SPICING UP THE BEDROOM: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION MESSAGES FOR INTIATING NEW SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

by

Shawna Harris

(Under the Direction of Jennifer Monahan)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aimed to understand the strategies used and variables that predict strategy use when first introducing something new to a sexual relationship. Two studies determined the communication strategies and variables that predict those strategies. The preliminary study coded open ended questions where people wrote about a time in which they wanted to try something new sexually. This study found that although people primarily used indirect strategies, many people also reported use of direct strategies. The second study used Predicted Outcome Value Theory as a foundation for predicting the use of various relationship specific (intimacy and sexual communication) and general sexual factors (number of partner and sexual stereotypes) that contribute to the use of direct and indirect behaviors. Results showed support for POV as a way to understand the process of communicating about a new sexual act. Also, results showed that relationship specific factors were better predictors of communicative strategies than general sexual factors. Implications the relationship has for introducing something new to a sexual relationship are presented.

INDEX WORDS: sexual communication, influence, sexual strategies, sexual relationship, predicted outcome value theory, intimacy

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GA

2009

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December 2009

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation in loving memory of my father, Martin Harris. I could not have done this without his support, encouragement and belief in me. I owe so much of who I am and what I have done to what he has taught me growing up. Although he didn't get to see the finished product, I know he is proud of me. Not a day goes by that I am not thankful that he was able to influence my life in so many ways. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who made it possible for me to finish my dissertation and my PhD. I would like to start by thanking God for giving me the support and ability to accomplish all my goals. Also, I am so lucky to have so many wonderful people in my life that made this process much more manageable.

I would be nowhere without my loving mom. She supported me throughout this entire process and always had faith in me even when I doubted myself. Not only did she and my dad always encourage me to pursue my desires but she spent countless hours listening to theories and ideas that undoubtedly bored her. Some of my best ideas came from discussing things with my mom. Also, I would like to take this time to thank my brothers, Matt, Wes, and Kelly for being an influential part of my life. I also would like to thank Matt for listening to me gripe about the day and always making me laugh. Whether on the phone or visiting me, I always had fun and was able to relax from the stress of grad school with him. Wes and my mom also played an important role in my data collection. Without them I might not have finished collecting data. I can always count on my family to help.

Next I would like to thank my colleagues and friends at the University of Georgia. I was lucky to know such a wonderful group of people who made this arduous process much more manageable. Without the friendly faces and help of the staff I would not have completed much of my work. My cohort in interpersonal communication, Shelly and Todd, were always there to lend a helping hand with statistics, theory and even general life problems. I owe a thank you to Mandi for being a wonderful, supportive friend during this last year and helping me to step away from it all when I needed. She never forgot to tell me when Walkers needed to change from a

work station to a place for social gatherings. Although they were not in the graduate program, special thanks goes to the people at Walkers who put up with me for countless hours while I read, wrote and often cussed at what I read or wrote. I would like to specifically acknowledge Erik. He often gave me words of encouragement and praise and he helped to provide much needed breaks during hours of working, even if they were in the form of things thrown at me. Also, I would like to thank Lisa for being my pool buddy and a close friend. Not only did she help me hash out some of my ideas for the dissertation but some of my most memorable moments happened with her, from dance parties to ordering pizzas after swimming. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Betsy for all the help that she gave me. She read chapters, helped organize ideas and understand statistics. I'm not sure I would have finished the dissertation without all her help, insight and her friendship.

None of the work at Georgia would have been possible without the support and encouragement from my Master's advisor, Jennifer Bevan. She suggested that I pursue a doctorate and helped give me the confidence in my work to continue my education. Many times during my doctorate I reflected on conversations with her that helped me get through everything and it was in her class that I found my passion for studying relational and sexual communication.

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks to my committee, Vicki, Jerry, Jessica, Jennifer Samp, and Jennifer Monahan. My dissertation and my views on communication research are significantly better for having each of these individuals on my committee. They all challenged my way of thinking encouraging me to take different perspectives and understandings to the research which made me a stronger writer, theorist and researcher. Vicki was especially influential during my time at Georgia giving me an opportunity to work on a grant that really

helped to guide my future endeavors in health communication. Jerry was always supportive with my desire to pursue sexual communication but never let me forget to think critically about the research. Jessica helped to bring more of a health application perspective to my dissertation that really made me understand the importance of the research beyond communication theories. Jennifer Samp has been a wonderful instructor throughout my time at Georgia always asking difficult questions that undoubtedly made me a better scholar and person. Although at times I am sure she was tired of asking me the same questions over in all of my research, I have finally learned to ask the question myself and this will continue to improve my work. The influence she has had on me will forever stay with me as both a scholar and a person. Without her help in the graduating process, I literally would not be graduating. Thank you for everything!

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my advisor and mentor… Jennifer Monahan. For the countless hours we spent in your office running data that I probably didn't even use… for pushing me to be a better scholar, writer, researcher, theorist, and individual… for always being there for me even when it had nothing to do with school… for correcting the same mistakes in my writing over and again…for ensuring I made it home to see my dad… for giving me time when I needed to clear my head and taking it away when I was getting ridiculous with the amount of time I was taking… for being explicit with your comments yet supportive of my work and ideas…for asking more from me than at times I thought I could do… and for knowing that I was able to do it. I thank you so much for all these things and many more. I feel so lucky having you as a guide throughout my doctorate. I have many memories of the time we spent together and although at times I may have gotten frustrated, I wouldn't trade the influence you have had on me for anything.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODCUTION

"Naughty Sex: 8 Hot new positions we've never published before" is a *Cosmopolitan* (Cosmo) article offering readers eight positions that will spice up their sex life by moving beyond the bedroom. In almost every issue of *Cosmo* there is an article suggesting techniques, props, ideas, and clothing that can help people have better sex. However, *Cosmo* is not the only magazine offering advice on this topic. *Men's Health* offers readers ways to "Make Good Sex Great" and *Elle* features a cover story titled "Good Guy- Bad Sex: Fix That Now" and *Essence* highlights on its cover "Love and Sex." In fact looking at a magazine shelf, one finds multiple magazines highlighting the word "sex" on the cover. On November 13, 2008, I spent ten minutes in a local bookstore looking at the covers of magazines and found 13 magazine covers that featured a cover story about sex. One thing these popular magazines suggest is that people are interested in reading about sex and changing aspects of their sex life. Considering the success of these popular magazines targeting a variety of demographics, one could say that keeping an exciting sex life is important to many individuals.

Cosmo, and other magazines, beg the question of whether anyone actually tries the recommendations and if so, how does a person ask a partner to change their sexual routine. Research has noted that there are many difficulties involved with discussing sex with a partner (e.g., Kleinplatz, 2006; Ross, Rosser, McCurdy, Feldman, 2007). Even *Cosmo* says that

communication can be tricky with a partner, but the magazine may fail to notice that the magazine itself can be a way to open up communication between individuals. Instead of asking if a partner would like to have sex on the washing machine, an individual can just leave the magazine open to the page with the suggestion for a partner to see. This dissertation examines the strategies people use to introduce something new sexually to a relationship. Specifically, I am interested in determining what strategies individuals commonly use and what factors affect the use of particular strategies. This chapter will first set up the importance of sexual communication and difficulties involved with sexual discussion and then provide a brief overview and goals of the dissertation.

Importance of Sexual Communication

The idea of shaking up a couple's sex life is not a new concept. One might consider a quick rendezvous in a public place, sex in the kitchen, or trying a new position but not know how his or her partner might react to the suggestion. This sense of uncertainty involved with communicating sexual desires can cause individuals to forgo suggesting an idea that may periodically or even routinely enter people's fantasies. Such a situation may seem to be miniscule in the grand scheme of romantic relationships but research has shown that relational satisfaction correlates with sexual satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999).

Sexual communication and relationships. Sex and relationship quality are so intricately linked that many married individuals use their sex life as a barometer to determine the health of their marriage (Elliot & Umberson, 2008). Researchers confirm the correlation between sex and relationship quality suggesting that there is a strong positive association between sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction in both married and dating partners (Byers, 2005; Byers, Demmons, & Lawrence, 1998; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Davies, Katz, & Jackson, 1999). Apt,

Hurlbert, Pierce, and White (1996) found that sexual satisfaction is even related to life satisfaction. In research on premarital relationships, Sprecher (2002) found that sexual satisfaction is related to other relational factors such as commitment, love, and stability for both men and women. Furthermore, because the study was longitudinal, she was able to determine that as changes in sexual satisfaction occurred so did changes in relational satisfaction, love, and commitment.

Sexual satisfaction is something that a couple must work towards through cooperative verbal and nonverbal communication. Cupach & Comstock (1990) found that sexual communication was linked to sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, Byers and Demmons (1999) discovered that self-disclosure about sexual likes and dislikes correlates with satisfaction of sexual communication, sexual satisfaction, and relational satisfaction. Not only can sexual communication increase overall sexual satisfaction but it may help to overcome sexual problems present in the relationship. Communication about sex can help individuals with inhibited sexual desire and women who are unable to orgasm. Nutter and Condron (1985) report that by finding comfort in discussing sexual fantasies, people can overcome problems of inhibited sexual desire. Kelly, Strassberg, and Turner (2006) found that communication even helps with sexual dysfunction. They studied how different dimensions of communication about sexual intercourse, cunnilingus, and direct genital stimulation affected women's sexual dysfunction. When discussing topics such as intercourse, cunnilingus, and direct genital stimulation, women with orgasmic disorders had low receptivity. Receptivity was measured by listening behaviors such as eye contact and attentiveness as well as verbal indicators such as acceptance and acknowledgement of partners' viewpoint. They found that couples with an anorgasmic female did more blaming when discussing intercourse than did "problem free" couples. Finally, men

who had anorgasmic partners were significantly less comfortable in talking about intercourse than men with partners without orgasmic problems. These studies suggest that communication about sex and sexual functioning are intimately related.

Not only can communication help with sexual difficulties it may help to alleviate discrepancies between partners' desires and actions. When it comes to sex, what a person actually wants, what one perceives a partner to desire, and what the couple does may not always be consistent. For instance, Miller and Byers (2004) found that the ideal length of foreplay did not significantly differ between men and women; however, the couples *perceived* that the desired length of foreplay was different between the sexes, which affected their actual behavior. This led to discrepancies between what the couples were doing and what the individuals actually wanted such that women significantly underestimated men's ideal length of foreplay and intercourse. Rather than discussing the topic, both men and women would use stereotypes to predict what a partner desires and behave according to those stereotypes; by discussing desires, these problems may be easily remedied.

In summary, communication is a vital component to a healthy sexual relationship and is linked to an overall satisfactory relationship. Not only is it important for individuals to discuss issues of health (e.g., condom use and birth control) and consent but people need to discuss sexual fantasies and desires. By communicating about these aspects of the relationship, individuals may overcome problems with sexual functioning as well as eliminate inconsistency between desires and actions. Sexual communication is linked to more satisfying sex, which in turn is positively correlated with relational satisfaction. However, these types of discussions may not come so easily to many people.

Problems with communicating about sex. If the overall effects of communicating about sex are positive for the relationship, why do so many people avoid discussing sex within a relationship? Colson, Lemaire, Pinton, Hamidi, and Klein (2006) found that people reported that in general discussing sex was very easy or quite easy with their partner; however, when looking at discussion of sexual practices (e.g., closeness, foreplay, enjoyment, and vaginal penetration) only 15.5% reported ease with this type of communication. In an effort to understand the negotiation of safer sex, Pliskin (1997) interviewed 124 individuals infected with genital herpes. She found that people are more afraid of being rejected by a partner than they were of contracting an STD or transmitting one (excluding AIDS); this fear of rejection has been reported by individuals concerning discussing sexual desires with a partner as well (Kleinplatz, 2006).

Rejection is not the only problem associated with revealing sexual fantasies and desires. Research examining men who have sex with men has found that some men prefer to meet partners online versus in person because of the ability to tell partners about fantasies without being embarrassed or ashamed (Ross, et al., 2007). In a case study of a couple with sexual problems, Kleinplatz (2006) found that neither partner was willing to express their sexual desires because of guilt, shame, and other personal reasons. This heterosexual couple eventually expressed a desire to engage in sadomasochism (S&M) and felt intense guilt and shame that they found S&M exciting. Furthermore, the man suggested that intellectually he should be opposed to such action because of his pro-feminist ideals. The wife was unwilling to express everything that she wanted because she was afraid to impose on her husband. Perhaps even more difficult to overcome was the idea of discussing and planning sexual episodes because they both believed in the myth that sex was supposed to be natural and spontaneous. Kleinplatz (2006) also worked

with a lesbian couple who expressed concerns of judgment, damage to reputation, and rejection that comes with discussing sexual desires.

Beyond the concerns that may be involved with discussing specific sexual practices, there is always the possibility that sex could be considered a taboo topic for a couple. Inappropriately self-disclosing sexual information may be perceived by a partner as a problematic event within that relationship (Samp & Solomon, 1999). This may, in turn, threaten the identities of the individuals within the couple as well as the relationship's identity. A concern for this type of response from a partner can make sexual self-disclosures difficult even if a person is comfortable with their own desires.

Although some of this research is based on individual cases, the work highlights many concerns that others are likely to have when it comes to discussing sexual practices with a partner. Research on sexual initiation has shown that it is often done through nonverbal-indirect means (e.g., Greer & Buss, 1994) in order to protect an individual's face (Cupach, 1994). Face is a concept used to refer to an individual's self image that is presented to others (Brown & Levinson, 1978). There are many face threats (anything that damages a person's self or public image) that are inherent with sexual initiation including but not limited to rejection. In a long-term relationship, these face threats may not be as apparent when initiating sex after the first time; however, these threats are likely to arise when initiating something *new* to the sexual relationship. As such, many individuals are likely to have similar concerns of rejection, embarrassment, or shame with introducing something new to a relationship, which can make communication a difficult task.

The current study focuses on communication within a sexual relationship with emphasis on introducing something new to a relationship. The research reviewed above suggested that

discussing sexual likes, dislikes, and fantasies can have a positive effect on the satisfaction and function of a sexual relationship. The topic of communication within a sexual framework is widely studied; however, the current author found limited studies on introducing something new sexually to a relationship. Rather, as will be described in Chapter Two much of the current research on sexual communication typically takes the form of factors predicting sexual assertiveness, health/safe sex communication, sexual scripts, and sexual initiation.

Existing Research on Introducing New Sexual Behaviors

One published study was found that examined initiating new sexual behaviors to heterosexual relationships to alleviate sexual boredom. Humphreys and Newby (2007) tackled this issue focusing on how new sex is initiated within a relationship. This study used hypothetical scenarios and asked college students to rate the likelihood that the hypothetical couple would use different initiation strategies and then asked the likelihood that the participants themselves would use the same tactics. The hypothetical conditions varied between the couple being together three weeks or two years in order to gain an understanding of the differences between strategies in long-term and short- term relationships.

Humphreys and Newby (2007) found that people reported different strategies for the hypothetical long-term and short-term relationships but did not report these differences within their own relationships. Furthermore, they found that situational features such as number of previous sexual partners and sexual self-disclosure affects the types of strategies an individual uses. This dissertation expands on the findings of Humpreys and Newby (2007). Their study based the majority of its findings on hypothetical scenarios and found that the actual use of strategies varied from strategy use reported for the hypothetical scenarios by asking participants to rate the likelihood of using each initiation tactic before asking participants to indicate the

strategies most likely to be used by the hypothetical couple. Thus, the current dissertation will focus on actual strategies used rather than hypothetical scenarios. Another manner in which this dissertation can expand on Humphreys and Newby's (2007) study is by using a theoretical approach to understand the communicative process underlying the decisions to use particular strategies. Specifically, Predicted Outcome Values Theory (Sunnafrank, 1988**)** is used to examine how relational and sexual factors may affect strategy use. Finally, an important way in which the two studies will differ is while Humphrey's and Newby focused on single initiation strategies this dissertation examines both the individual and subsequent strategies one partner uses to gain the compliance of the other. Compliance- gaining refers to a process "aimed at getting others to do something or to act in a particular way" (Gass & Seiter, 1999, p. 205) and, in this dissertation, convincing a partner to try something new sexually. Thus, the hopes of the current dissertation are to expand on the findings of Humphreys and Newby and gain more insight into the process reported by individuals.

Brief Overview of Dissertation

This research has two goals towards understanding the communicative strategies of individuals in sexual relationships: 1) to demonstrate what strategies people actually use to get a partner to try something new sexually, 2) using Predicted Outcome Value (POV) theory as a foundation for understanding those factors that predict the use of particular strategies to introduce something new. As such, this dissertation consists of two studies: Describing strategies in the first study and predicting strategies in the second.

The preliminary study describes strategies people use by asking individuals to write about a time in which they introduced something new sexually to a relationship. My goal with the preliminary study was to determine what strategies people do use, if a theory could explain the

strategies used, and look at potential gender differences that may exists between strategies individuals used. The theories/typologies used to guide the first study were Identity Implications Theory (Wilson et al., 1998), Marwell & Schmitt's (1967) typology of compliance- gaining strategies, and literature on nonverbal immediacy; each of which will be further explained in Chapter 2.

Based on the results from the preliminary study, the main study used Predicted Outcomes Value Theory (POV) as a foundation for understanding the factors that influence strategy use. POV proposes that people desire to reduce uncertainty and simultaneously judge the future outcomes of interactions; the ability to predict future outcomes can help people maximize relational outcomes (Sunnafrank, 1986). Thus, the process of communication allows an individual to predict future behaviors in order to determine how to continue an interaction. When negative behavioral outcomes are predicted, individuals will limit communication but when positive outcomes are predicted an individual will continue to communicate. This idea of determining the manner in which to proceed within an interaction can be applied to the process of introducing a new sexual act.

Because the dissertation consists of two studies, the approach to the literature review will be presented, atypically, across two chapters. First, Chapter Two presents existing literature on sexual communication and compliance gaining as well as present the methods, results, and discussion for the preliminary study. Chapter Three presents literature regarding POV, as well as the relational and sexual factors that I will argue should influence how an individual will predict future outcomes. Chapter Four describes the method used to study hypotheses formulated in Chapter Three while Chapter Five presents the results of this investigation. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the implications for the results of both the preliminary and main study.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY STUDY

The goal of Chapter 2 is to *describe* and *categorize* the strategies individuals say they have used in the past to convince a sexual partner to try a new sexual act. Towards that goal, Chapter 2 presents a preliminary study whereby individuals were asked to write about a time when they had engaged in such an attempt and the strategies they articulated were coded based on prior work in sexual communication and compliance gaining. The purpose of the literature review for Chapter 2 is to examine prior work in sexual communication and in compliance-gaining to (a) understand the constraints on strategy choices, (b) to form a theoretical basis for the coding of the strategies and (c) provide a basis for comparing the strategies used in this specific situation to prior research.

Little work, beyond clinical psychology, has focused specifically on communication about sexual needs/desires. As such this chapter will present literature that currently exists within the realm of sexual communication specifically focusing on sexual health, sexual scripts, and sexual initiation strategies. Also, it examines literature on compliance-gaining as applicable to the current study. I then present methods, results and discussion on a preliminary study of strategies individuals use to introduce something new into an *established* sexual relationship. For the purpose of this dissertation, I refer to an established sexual relationship as any relationship in which the partners already have engaged in what are stereotypical forms of intercourse based on sexuality: vaginal, anal, and oral sex for heterosexual, homosexual, and lesbian relationships respectively.

Literature Review

Current Research on Sexual Communication

As noted above, published research specifically examining communicative strategies concerning new sexual acts is limited. The majority of research focuses on health perspectives such as talking to a partner about sexual histories, discussion about STI testing, and negotiating condom use. As such I turned to this literature, along with sexual scripts and sexual initiation to gain some insight on the communicative strategies that exist when discussing sex.

Sexual health. One area in which sexual communication has been extensively studied is in sexual health. Much of this research has focused on safer sexual communication and condom use (e.g., Greene & Faulkner, 2005; Noar, Carlyle, & Cole, 2006; Pliskin, 1997; Cline, Johnson, & Freeman, 1992); however, there have been some studies that differentiate types of strategies within this realm. Lam et al. (2004) were interested in determining what types of condom negotiation strategies were most effective differentiating between verbal-nonverbal and direct-indirect (subtle vs. explicit) strategies. They found that overall direct strategies were used most often but culture and gender did influence types of strategies that people used. Specifically they found that Asians use more verbal- indirect strategies than Whites and women use more nonverbal- indirect strategies than men. However, Bird, Harvey, Beckman, and Johnson (2001) found that men and women use strategies that are "neither weak nor indirect" (p. 239) suggesting that women use explicit, assertive strategies for negotiating condom use. Similarly, Harris and Bevan (2006) found people report being direct with condom requests despite gender. This consistent pattern of findings shows that people can become comfortable and assertive enough to be direct in regards to negotiating condom use.

Despite research that suggests many individuals use direct strategies for negotiating condom use, other work suggests there are issues of face when negotiating condom use that might affect an individual's willingness to use direct strategies (Reel & Thompson, 2004). Reel and Thompson found individuals reported that the use of nonverbal messages and not engaging in the face-threatening act (being direct) is less effective but more socially appropriate and less likely to have negative effects on a relationship. As such, people are likely to use these indirect strategies to preserve a relationship.

The research reported above is helpful in offering some insight into strategies that people use when discussing sexual health; however, research has shown that discussing safe sex can be different from communicating sexual desires. Morokoff, Quina, Harlow, Whitmire, Grimley, Gibson, and Burkholder (1997) found that sexual assertiveness has multiple dimensions and being able to ask for protection and refusing unwanted sex was different from initiating sexual contact such that people who were able to request protection were not necessarily able to initiate sex. Quina et al. (2000) also found that communicating about sexual pleasure was different from discussing HIV. They found that the ability to discuss HIV risk was not associated with assertive communication concerning sexual preferences. Thus, while research within the sexual health field may be useful as a starting point with communication as a new sex act, Quina et al. (2000) and Morokoff et al. (1997) would suggest that there may be discrepancies between sexual health communication and sexual pleasure communication.

Sexual scripts. Another approach to research on sexual communication is through the scripts people follow in sexual situations. Some research has used sexual scripts as a framework for understanding condom use; however, research on scripts also offers insight into general communication about sex (Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1993; Miller, Bettencourt, DeBro, & Hoffmann,

1993). According to script theory, people operate interpersonally based on cognitive representations of the scenario that are founded on cultural context (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). These scripts outline expectations of a scenario by sequentially identifying all the behaviors of both people involved in a sexual episode. Recently, LaFrance (2008) used Edgar and Fitzpatrick's (1993) work on sexual scripts to analyze the likelihood sex would occur for each of the behaviors reported within the script. She found that participants first thought sex was a possibility in the public setting when the man kisses the woman but as the script progressed there was a positive linear correlation with the likelihood that sex would occur. This study illustrates that scripted behaviors are intended to increase the likelihood of sex to occur (with a few exceptions such as token resistance by the woman). This research also suggests that individuals will plan or use existing scripts to increase the likelihood that sex will occur. Perhaps scripts are the plans that people use to lower the possibility of rejection.

Although these studies add insight into when and where people discuss sex and some information on the process of getting sex, the actual conversation or strategy choice has not been elaborated on. Yet, these studies illustrate that initiating sex is a process and offer insight into behaviors leading up to sex (e.g., kissing, touching genitals, etc). Furthermore, these script studies show the utility of nonverbal communication as the majority of the behaviors used within the script were nonverbal messages. These sexual scripts allude to the possibility of using multiple strategies in order to gain compliance from a partner when trying to initiate sex.

Initiating sex. One of the rare areas that sexual strategies have been examined is within the literature that looks at initiating sexual interactions with most work examining demographic variables that affect strategies used. For example, Greer & Buss (1994) have shown that men and women rate the effectiveness of sexual initiation strategies differently. Tactics that were

considered more effective for women were usually more direct such as explicitly stating a desire for sex or increasing sexual contact. However, there were no significant differences in the strategies *actually* used as both male and female participants reported use of more indirect strategies such as kissing a partner and moving closer to a partner. Many of the strategies used were nonverbal and often did not convey a clear message of desire for sexual intercourse (e.g., grooming oneself and using cologne or perfume).

The manner in which Greer and Buss (1994) examined these strategies through directness and as verbal or nonverbal strategies is a common approach to looking at initiation strategies. Gossman, Julien, Mathieu, and Chartrand (2002) identified 37 sexual initiation strategies for married or cohabitating couples and found that they factored into two groups: direct and indirect. These strategies could further be identified as verbal or nonverbal according to the nature of the behavior resulting in four categories: verbal-direct, verbal-indirect, nonverbal-direct, and nonverbal-indirect. An older study concerned with strategies to pursue and to resist sex identified 10 categories: reward, coercion, logic, information, manipulation, body language, deception, moralizing, relationship conceptualizing, and seduction (McCormick, 1979). This study further categorized these strategies into direct and indirect based on theoretical understanding of the strategies. Body language, deception, and manipulation were all considered indirect while the other seven were considered direct influential attempts based on the use of power and the awareness by the partner of the use of power.

These studies on sexual initiation highlight the dimensions of indirect and direct strategies as well as illustrating the prevalence of nonverbal strategies within sexual communication. Furthermore, research on sexual initiation shows that individuals often use multiple strategies to influence a partner to have sexual intercourse and this research elaborates

on specific types of strategies that people use within a sexual encounter. However, the research on sexual initiation varies from the current study because the first encounter may be different from changing a routine within a relationship. Finally, research within sexual initiation most often examines and/or includes one-night stands whereas the current research is interested in people who are already in a sexual relationship with their partner but want to try something new. Research on sexual scripts supports the assumption that sex in a committed relationship is different from a casual relationship (Lenton & Bryan, 2005) such that in the committed relationship scripts people reported sex to be an expression of emotion (love/affection) and expressed commitment to a partner (commonly in referring to a partner as boyfriend-girlfriend or spouse) whereas casual scripts did not include these aspects of the script.

Summary. Several studies reviewed above found gender plays a role in the manner in which people communicate about sex. Interestingly, there are different perspectives within the literature regarding whether men or women are more direct with communication. For example, in the health literature some researchers suggest that there are no differences in strategies used by men and women (Bird et al., 2001) but others suggest that women are more likely than men to be indirect (Lam et al., 2004). Research in sexual initiation suggest that gender differences exist in what people view as effective strategies but there are no differences in actual use of indirect and direct strategies (Greer & Buss, 1994). Because previous research has yielded inconsistent results, the current study will ask a research question in order to examine possible gender differences in the use of specific strategies. The first research question asks:

RQ1: Are there gender differences in types of strategies that people use to initiate a new sexual act?

The review of sex literature also suggests the possibility of participants using multiple strategies during a sexual communication. For instance, research shows that people have sexual scripts for specific sexual encounters (e.g., Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1993) and that the likelihood of sex occurring increases as the sexual script continues (LaFrance, 2008). Furthermore, research on sexual initiation suggests the possibility of using multiple strategies in a single initiation episode as well as a prominent use of indirect behaviors to initiate sex (Greer & Buss, 1994) that would require follow up strategies. Thus for the current study we predict that participants will use more than one strategy in order to introduce a new sexual act to a relationship:

H1: Participants will report the use of multiple strategies to introduce something new to an established sexual relationship.

Compliance Gaining Research

The major focus of the preliminary study is to describe and, thus, categorize the type of strategies individuals in relationships use when trying to get a partner to try a new sexual behavior. The sexual communication literature was reviewed for evidence indicating what type of strategies (e.g., direct vs. non-direct, nonverbal, etc.) may be relevant when individuals want to get a sexual partner to try a new sexual behavior. However, given that the *task* is one of compliance-gaining (how to get my partner to do what I want), it is equally important to examine the compliance-gaining (also known as the social influence) literature to gain a more complete understanding of the type of influence strategies individuals may be prone to use. A purpose of the preliminary study is to examine what specific strategy types are employed; thus, I needed to review literature that was tailored towards differentiating strategies.

Compliance strategies. Compliance gaining refers to any interpersonal interaction during which a message sender attempts to influence another to perform a desired behavior (Wilson,

2002). One of the most prominent and widely used typologies of compliance-gaining strategies is Marwell and Schmitt's (1967) dimensions of compliance-gaining. Within this study they determined that there were 16 types of strategies all of which factored into one of five dimensions that could be further divided into one of two categories: socially acceptable and unacceptable.

Similar to Marwell and Schmitt, Hunter and Boster's (1987) model of compliance-gaining messages suggests that individuals choose strategies based on the expected emotional effect of the message on the receiver and discuss strategies in terms of positive and negative. Positive strategies are one that are less intrusive and will elicit a less negative emotional response from the listener (such as hinting); however, negative strategies are one's that are less socially acceptable and are likely to elicit negative feeling (such as negative self-feeling, e.g., "you will feel really bad about yourself if you do not help me with this").

Hunter and Boster (1987) further elaborate on when positive and negative strategies are employed. They note that in most compliance gaining situations, the *first* strategy that is tried is usually positive (socially acceptable one), yet when persuaders are faced with resistance, they increasingly employ negative strategies (e.g. Hample & Dallinger, 1998) such as threats. Not surprisingly, individuals prefer using positive compliance gaining strategies, however negative ones are often more effective (e.g., Hernandez & Rabow, 1987; Seibold & Thomas, 1994). Dillard and Burgoon (1985) suggest a persuader is more likely to switch to negative strategies when the persuader feels compliance is in the best interest of the person being influenced.

Face-saving literature. Brown and Levinson (1978) introduced *politeness* as the basic motive behind the manner in which people choose their words as well as other types of communicative acts during requests. According to politeness theory, people are concerned about

the self-image that is presented to others and the theory refers to this concept as "face." Face is an emotional investment that may be lost, maintained or enhanced. They note that many influence attempts threaten either one's negative face (one's need for autonomy and one's right to not have others impose on them) or one's positive face (one's need for positive self-image; that one is approved and appreciated by important others).

In a given interaction, face threats occur for both the persuader and the person he or she attempts to influence. For example, if a persuader uses too harsh or negative of a strategy (e.g., do this act with me or I'll dump you), her positive face of being a good person can be threatened. If the person being influenced feels resentful and being pushed to try something he does not want to try, then his negative face is threatened.

While Brown and Levinson (1987) note that speakers typically are not conscious of how the precise wording in their communication reflects the need to balance positive and negative face concerns, there are situations when interactants are more likely to be highly aware of such face concerns (e.g., job interviews, meeting the in-laws for the first time, asking a friend to borrow a substantive sum of money) and Cupach (1994) suggests that sexual communication is a good example of a situation where the persuader is more likely to be aware of the need to balance face concerns. Identity implications theory (IIT; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998) updated politeness theory by examining how face threats differ as a function of the primary goal of the interaction (e.g., what the person wants to attain). IIT proposed four types of strategies that people use in order to mitigate specific face threats: reason-giving (explaining why), persistence (continue to request more than once), pressure (suggest the person must do the request), and approval (making the listener feel positive or supported).

Nonverbal literature. Third, I turned to nonverbal literature as the sexual literature suggested that nonverbal communication was significant to understanding the process in which people communicate about sex. Specifically, nonverbal immediacy behaviors appear as a strategy that many might use. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors are those "acts or actions that signal a desire to establish closer contact with another person while exhibiting warmth, closeness, and availability" (Leathers, 1997, p.342). This research on nonverbal immediacy helped to understand behaviors such as eye contact, touch, proximity, and gesturing.

Research Question Guiding Study

As noted above, the general research question guiding the preliminary study is what strategies are used to introduce a new sexual act into an established sexual relationship. Previous research in sexual communication and compliance gaining was used to generate a coding scheme to best capture the strategies individuals report employing. The following sections elaborate on the process for gaining insight into this research question, results from the study, and a discussion about the implications the results have for applying a theory to understand the process of getting a partner to try something new.

Method

Participants

One hundred sixty five participants were solicited from introductory speech communication courses at a large southern university to participate in a study about sexual communication. Of the 165 undergraduates that participated, 60.6% were female and the majority of participants were white (75.8%). Of the remaining participants, 9.1% reported their ethnicity as Asian and 6.7% reported their ethnicity as Black/African American. The mean age of participants was 19.99 (SD= 1.64; Mdn = 20). The length of time the couple had been together at

the time of the new request ranged from less than one month to 73 months (*M*= 10.78, *SD*= 12.19, *Mdn* = 6.00) with majority participants describing the relationship as serious/exclusive (72%). No minors or members of any vulnerable populations participated. The participants received course research credit for participating. The university's IRB approved these procedures.

Procedure

Participants were asked to sign up at a date and time that was convenient for them. Upon arrival, the nature of the study was explained to students, and the researcher verbally described and distributed the consent forms. Students had the opportunity to review the consent forms and ask questions. To increase anonymity, there was a waiver of informed consent signature; participants indicated they consented by submitting a completed survey. After completing the survey, participants were given a written debriefing form and were released. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete and no problems occurred during data collection.

Instrument

Participants were given the opportunity to either write about a time in which they tried something new with a partner or a time a partner tried something new with them. They were encouraged to write about a time that they wanted something new if it was at all possible. The researchers stressed to participants the importance that the couple had already had sex in the relationship to minimize the number of people who wrote about the first time they had sex. They were given the following directions:

> You will write about a time when you wanted to try a new sexual act with your partner but were uncertain about how he/she would respond. **NOTE**: **Do not write about a one-**

> **night stand**. If you can not think of a time, you can write about when *someone else* wanted you to try something new sexually.

Participants then circled whether they were taking Option A (I wanted to try something new sexually) or Option B (A partner wanted to try something new sexually). Then the following directions were provided with room for the participants to describe the situation:

> Write the steps you took to try something new sexually. Start with when you first decided to take action and end with getting what you wanted or when you gave up. Make sure to write down *everything* you did, hinted or said and what your partner did or said. (For Option B: follow these instructions but think about what your sexual partner said/hinted/did and how you responded.)

Following these instructions were specific questions asking participants to write all the steps for getting their partner to try something new from the point they decided to try something new until they got what they wanted or gave up.

Next participants indicated whether they got what they wanted or simply gave up. Third, participants were asked to indicate why they were uncertain about the manner in which their partner would respond. The specific wording read, "You wrote about a time when you were uncertain about how your sexual partner would react to your request. Below, write down why you were uncertain about how he/she would react."

Finally, participants reported on their gender, ethnicity, age, their partner's gender, and how long they had been in the relationship at the point in which they made the request. Participants' gender helped to determine any gender differences in strategies used and partners' gender was measured to determine if differences exist between heterosexual, homosexual, and lesbian interactions. Furthermore, ethnicity, age and length of relationship were important for

understanding the population used. A copy of the measurement instrument can be found in Appendix A along with the consent and debriefing forms for the preliminary study.

Coding Process

Creating the codebook. A two step process was used to code the stories provided by participants: (1) creation of the codebook, and (2) coding of the strategies. The first step was solely dedicated to the creation of the codebook. The codebook was formed using the compliance-gaining, sexual communication and nonverbal communication literatures referenced above. To generate the coding scheme, I reviewed all the strategy types found within the nonverbal, sexual and compliance gaining literatures and eliminated redundancies, generalized overly specific acts, and broke down complex acts into their more simple components. Then, the author and her advisor did preliminary coding (20% of the data), talked through changes thoroughly, and made necessary modifications (adding missing codes; determine if codes were mutually exclusive, etc.). This procedure created 25 mutually exclusive categories to be used to identify the types of strategies within the data. These categories are in Table 1, including definitions of each category and example behaviors.

Table 1

Codes for Strategies

Strategy Type
1. **Bring up in general**. Easing into the conversation by generally asking about a topic without directly stating or asking for a specific thing. Examples: So what are you thoughts about anal sex" "Have you heard about this?" Would you like to try *something* new?
2. **Direct Request.** Directly asks if a partner wants to try a particular new act. Example: I asked, "Do you want to…" "Would you like to try…?"
3. **Direct Statement.** Directly states or tells their partner the new act that they want to do. Example: "I want to try it doggy-style"

4. **Direct action.** Initiate or does the act without verbal communication. Example: "When I want something new, I just do it without asking; I just turned her around during missionary."
5. **Setout sex aide.** The participant sets in view of a partner something that they want to use. Example: dildo, porn video, whip cream, magazine; "I showed him the magazine"
6. **Hinted.** A participant states that they hinted without stating how exactly they hinted. Example: "dropped verbal hints about how I wanted to try it"
7. **Made jokes.** States he/she brought up the subject or made jokes about what they wanted. Examples: "I first used it in the context of a joke; I made jokes about how much fun it would be"
8. **Justification/Rationale.** A participant justifies or offer reasons to try something new. Example: "I suggested we try something new to spice up our sex life."
9. **Persistence.** Repetitively make requests or try to pressure a partner into trying something. Examples: He kept asking until I gave in, "I did it three times until I finally gave up. "
10. **No Commitment.** A strategy suggesting the partner does not have to always do the act or tries to minimize imposition on a partner. Example: "let's try just once."
11. **Altruism.** Indicate trying a new act will be a favor or will change the requester's view of their partner in a positive way. Examples: "Do this as a favor for me." "You'd really be helping me out if we did this together." "I will love you if you try it"
12. **Good for you/good for Relationship.** Trying a new act will be good for the partner or good for the relationship. Examples: try it you'll like it, "I know you'll really enjoy this"
13. **PreGiving and/or be nice** beforehand to get what I want. When they *behave* in ways that are nice or give their partner rewards prior to asking for something new. Examples: "I took out the trash and did the dishes so that she would be in a good mood when I asked for what I wanted later"
14. **You owe me/debt.** When someone *states* that they have done things for their partner. Example: "I reminded him how often I gave him oral sex"
15. **Bargain.** Offering to do things for the partner (or makes a deal), for partners compliance with the sexual act. Examples: "If you go down on me, I'll go down on you"
16. **Threat**. If the person doesn't comply they will be punished. Examples: "I wasn't going to give him oral sex until he gave me it"
17. L**ower inhibitions.** Sets up the situation to increase the likelihood of compliance. Examples: using alcohol, getting them drunk

18. **Facial behavior-** Using a facial expression to show what they wanted. Examples I made a facial expression that was a signal what I desired; I looked where I wanted him to touch me.
19. **Gaze/look OTHER.** A person looks at something/somewhere to signal what they want. Example: They looked at where they wanted me to go.
20. **Gaze/Look PARTNER.** Looks at partner in a way to suggest what they want. Example: I just looked at him and he knew what I wanted; we looked at each other and we knew.
21. **Dress.** Dress to suggest what they want. Example: wear lingerie, costumes, etc.
22. **Gesture.** Gesturing to suggest what they want. Example: We ate hotdog and other suggestive food; pointing at something.
23. **Touch SELF.** Pose or touch owns *own* body to suggest what they want. Examples: pose my body, touch myself, and get myself into position.
24. **Touch PARTNER.** Touch or moves a partner to hint what they want without directly performing the behavior. Examples: "I used my tongue and finger respectively to see if she would even enjoy it (anal sex)"
25. **Asked/told partner to change position.** When a person does not explain what they are doing but rather instruct him/her to do specific things without specifically stating the act they want to perform. Examples: "I told my partner to roll over so we could do it doggy-style"

The sexual communication literature (Gossman et al., 2002; Greer & Buss, 1994; Lam et al., 2004) suggests that nonverbal strategies are often employed in sexual communication. Described in Table 1, the following codes were used to capture nonverbal behavior: *direct action (4*), *setting out a sex aid (5), gesturing (22), facial behavior* (*18*), *gaze (19) (20) lowering inhibitions (17), use of dress,* (21) *touching the self (23)* and *touching the partner (24).* The strategy number is found in parentheses for those who want to examine the coding scheme for each as shown in Table 1.

Second, the compliance gaining literature and the literature on condom use suggests that often individuals engage in direct verbal requests without any explanation or manipulation.

Direct strategies are any strategy in which the partner is straightforward about the actions s/he desires from another (Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1988). Based on literature suggesting the use of direct behaviors without any other manipulation to the message, the following codes were included: *direct request* (2), *direct statement* (3), and *asked partner to change position (25)*. However, many strategies provided by Marwell & Schmitt (1968) are also direct but include other message qualities such as manipulation or explanation. These strategies included: *debt* (14), *bargaining* (15), *threat* (16) *altruism (11)*, and *pre-giving (13).* The literature also included indirect verbal strategies which were coded as: *bring up topic in general* (1), *hint* (6), *make joke* (7). Indirect strategies are those that hint to a topic but are unclear about the individual's desires (Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1988).

As noted above (Wilson & Feng, 2007), identity implications theory proposed four strategy types to mitigate face threats: reason-giving (explaining why), persistence (continue to request more than once), pressure (suggest the person must do the request), and approval (making the listener feel positive or supported). Based on this research, the following codes were used: *justification/rationale* (8), *persistence* (9), *no commitment* (10), *good for you/relationship* (12).

Strategy coding. Once the codebook was finalized each survey was read to look for strategies aimed at getting something new sexually. Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978) often examines strategies through individual speech acts. A speech act might contain just one word (please?) or several words or sentences (Would you be interested in trying X?). Along with individual speech acts, Identity Implications Theory (Wilson et al., 1998) argues for a more episodic analysis, for example beginning with the first attempt to gain compliance and ending when the compliance gaining attempt achieved success or when the speaker (at least temporarily)

halts seeking compliance. I used IIT theory by examining individual phrases (e.g., get them drunk) and sentences (e.g., I just told him what I wanted) contained within an influence episode. Specifically, a statement was considered to be a strategy if the word or phrase suggested that the participants' intention was to increase the likelihood of a partner's willingness to engage in the desired behavior (e.g., play seductive music; drink alcohol, turned her over) or if the individual attempted to send a message about interest or desire to engage in the new act. As such, participants may take one paragraph to explain a single influence strategy in detail or they may refer to two or more strategies in a given sentence (e.g., "I asked her if she'd want to try it and then I told her I really wanted to do this).

The author and a second coder coded all of the surveys using the 25 mutually exclusive categories that were developed for the codebook. The second coder was a female, undergraduate student who underwent five hours of training and was blind to the purpose of the study. The coders independently read through each of the stories determining number of strategies and recording each into a specific category based on the codebook. Intercoder reliability was acceptable for strategy type ($\kappa = .91$).

Number of strategies and timing. The coders also coded for the number of strategies within a story and the order each strategy was mentioned in the story. In the initial trial of the codebook (by the author and her advisor), we discovered that many people reported that they specifically brought the topic up when they were already engaging in sex or sexual behaviors (kissing, foreplay, intercourse, etc.). Thus, a code was created for *when* the participants first introduced the topic of something new: during sexual activity (including immediately following intercourse), prior to sexual activity, or unspecified.

Coding uncertainty. Uncertainty was not a concern within the initial conceptualization of the study; rather, uncertainty was used to get participants to think of a salient experience. Thus, the study was situated to ask participants to report on a time in which they were uncertain about how a partner would respond in hopes that the uncertainty would make the experience more memorable and, in turn, provide a more accurate description of the experience. I then asked about why participants were uncertain about their partner's response to gain a better understanding of the perceptions participants had about the experience.

The codebook for the uncertainty question was influenced by literature suggesting that influence attempts take into consideration self concerns, other concerns or concerns about the relationship (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). As such each of the uncertainty codes can be further categorized into dimensions of concern for self (e.g., "I was worried my partner would think I was a sex freak"), partner (e.g., I wasn't sure if my partner would be comfortable with it"), or relationship (e.g., "I was worried that my partner would leave me"). After initially, considering three levels of uncertainty (partner, self or relationship), the author read through twenty of the questionnaires and developed 15 mutually exclusive categories.

The coding categories for uncertainty are found in Table 2**.** First, a code was generated to indicate if a person reported not feeling uncertain about how a partner would respond (code 1 in Table 2). Second a set of codes indicating concerns about the partner were created. Partner may… *Not want to do it* (2), *offend/upset* (3), *physically hurt* (4), *sexually inexperienced* (5), *religious views* (6) *insecure about body* (7). Third, category codes for concern about the relationship were created: *new act for both of us* (8), *hurt the relationship* (10), and, *unhappy with relationship* (11). Finally, a set of category codes were created for concerns that focused primarily on the self were: *My fear of rejection/concern for how partner views me* (13), *difficult*

to bring it up (14), *awkward/unusual request* (9), *insecure about how my partner views my body* (15), *something I would not do for partner* (12).

Table 2

Uncertainty Codebook

Category
1. I was not uncertain. (The person explicitly states there was no uncertainty and writes nothing else).
2. Partner may not like it/want to do it
3. May offend/upset partner
4. Afraid may physically hurt my partner
5. Partner is sexually inexperienced
6. Partner religious beliefs/views
7. Partner insecure about body
8. New act to both of us/we never talked about it/new idea for us
9. Unusual request (awkward, out of the norm)
10. It may hurt, adversely change, or destroy the relationship
11. He/she may think I am unhappy with our relationship
12. It is something I wouldn't do for partner
13. I am afraid of rejection, concerned with how partner views me
14. Difficult to bring up (difficult to talk about, I am shy, I can't talk about sex, NOTE: This is about how the person is uncertain and afraid to talk about sex *to* the partner—it is not uncertainty about the partner's willingness)
15. I am insecure about my body/partner may not like my body

The information provided by participants was read and statements that described a concern of the participants were coded using the above codebook. Majority of the participants

simply responded with a short statement (e.g, “I wasn’t sure if she would want to do it). However in instances where more information was provided key words were used to identify the reasons of uncertainty. These words were “concerned,” “worried,” “afraid,” and “uncertain.” Each description was also coded for number of reasons provided. The author and the undergraduate coder read each response coding for why participants were uncertain. Intercoder reliability was sufficient ($\kappa = .89$)

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Participants were eliminated if a) they wrote about the first time they had sex with this partner or b) they chose the response where they wrote about what their partner did to influence the participant to have sex. These eliminations resulted in a final N of 102. The average age was 20.14 years (*SD*= 1.68, *Mdn* = 20.00) and 51% were female (*n*= 52). The average length of relationship at the time of the request was under a year (*M*=10.48 months, *SD*= 11.96, *Mdn*= 6 months). The majority of participants were White (76.5%, *n*= 78) and of the remaining nine were Asian (8.8%), six were African American (5.9%), four were Hispanic (3.9%), three reported “Other” (2.9%), one participant reported Native American and one reported “Native Hawaiian” (1.0%). Finally, 86.3% reported success in their compliance-gaining attempt.

Strategies

I proposed participants would report using multiple strategies. Participants used on average of two strategies (*M* = 2.04, *SD* =.96, *Mdn* = 2.00) to influence a partner to try something new. Approximately one-third of participants clearly indicated they first introduced the topic of trying something new during sex/foreplay (36.3%, *n*= 37), about 30% introduced the topic during sex and coders were unclear about the remaining participants.

Popular strategies. In describing strategies used, I followed my advisor's advice and am presenting only those strategies mentioned by a minimum of 5% of respondents. I first ran a frequency (regardless as to when the strategy was reported) to determine the most popular strategies used by participants. As shown in Column 1 of Table 3, out of the 25 strategies coded, the most popular strategy used was "Direct Statement" (19.4%). The second most popular strategy used was "Bring it up in general" (17.5%). "Direct Action" was the third most popular strategy used overall (10.9%), followed by "Persistence" (7.6%). Finally, "Direct Request" was the fifth most popular strategy mentioned 15 times (7.1%).

Table 3

Most Popular Strategies

	All Strategy Types	Collapsed Strategies
Most Popular	Direct Statement (19.4%)	Direct Behaviors (37.9%)
2nd	Bring up in General (17.5%)	Gauge Response (27.0%)
3rd	Direct Action (10.9%)	Persistence (7.6%)
4th	Persistence (7.6%)	----------
5th	Direct Request (7.1%)	----------

Table reflects strategies used by 5% or more of the sample (N = 102)

Collapsing strategies. With the large number of category codes, the frequency of participants reporting each category was low. To increase the number of participants within categories to gain an understanding of the patterns of strategies, several of the categories were collapsed. Primarily, I made the decision to follow much of the sexual communication research by collapsing relevant category codes into indirect behavior (Titled "gauging partner's response") or direct behavior. The general category, *gauging partner's response,* was formed by collapsing "hinted," "joking" and "bring up in general." The second general category, *direct behavior,* was formed by collapsing "direct action," "direct statement," "direct request," and "told partner how to move." With this change, I reexamined the frequency data of the overall most popular strategies out of the 19 new categories (the two new general ones and the fifteen that were not collapsed). As shown in column 2 of Table 3, the most popular strategy used was "direct behaviors" (37.9%). The second most popular strategy used was "gauge partner's response" (27%). "Persistence" was third (7.6%) and was the only other strategy used by more than 5% of participants.

Order of strategies. Table 4 presents the most popular strategies as a function of when the strategy was mentioned in the story using the collapsed data set.

The initial strategy for all participants fell into 1 of 8 categories. The most popular *first* strategy used was "gauge the partner's response" followed by "direct behaviors" and "lower inhibitions" was the third most popular strategy mentioned first. The rest of the strategies had fewer than 5% of the sample selecting them.

Seventy (68.6%) of the participants then employed a second strategy. The number of categories of strategy types increased from 8 (for the first strategy) to 15 different strategies being reported on the second attempt. "Direct behaviors" was the most popular (51.4%) followed

by "persistence" (10.0%). "gauge partner's response" was the third most popular second attempt (8.6%).

Table 4

Top Three Most Popular Strategies by Order Mentioned in Story

	Order Mentioned in Story		
	First	Second	Third
Most Popular	Gauge Response (50.0%)	Direct Behaviors (68.6%)	Persistence (28.6%)
2nd	Direct Behavior (36.3%)	Persistence (10.0%)	Direct Behaviors (25.0%)
3rd	Lower Inhibitions (5.9%)	Gauge Response (8.6%)	No Commitment (17.9%)
4th	Pre-give (2.0%)	Bargain (5.7%)	Justification (7.1%)
5th	Touch partner (2.0%)	Altruism (4.3%)	Sex Aid (3.6%)
6th	Sex Aid (2.0%)	No commitment (2.9%)	Good for you (3.6%)
7th	Justification (1.0%)	Debt (2.9%)	Threat (3.6%)
8th	Good for you (1.0%)	Sex Aid (1.4%)	Lower Inhibitions (3.6%)
9th	--------	Good for you (1.4%)	Look at partner (3.6%)
10th	--------	Pre-give (1.4%)	Touch partner (3.6%)
11th	--------	Lower Inhibitions	--------

		(1.4%)	
12th	--------	Gesture (1.4%)	--------
13th	--------	Touch Self (1.4%)	--------
Total Number of Strategies	8	13	10

Table reflects strategies used by 5% or greater of sample (N = 102).

Not surprisingly, there was a substantial drop in sample size for the third strategy with only 27.5% reporting a third strategy. There were ten different types of strategies used on the third attempt with most participants reporting "persistence" (28.6%). This was followed by "direct behavior" (25.0%). Finally, "no commitment" was mentioned by five participants (17.9%). Only nine people moved on to use a fourth strategy and all nine used different strategies with the exception of "justification/rationale" which was used by two of the remaining participants. Only two participants reported a fifth strategy. As such, the focus of the research here will be on the first three strategies. This does not suggest that individuals only tried two or three times as several reported persistence during the third attempt but rather in general, only reported using two or three different types of strategies.

Strategy Patterns

The data were examined across the influence attempts to see what patterns of strategy use emerged. The analyses suggest two distinct patterns in the data: Indirect to direct and direct to rationale.

Start slow: Indirect to direct pattern. A common pattern in social influence especially when there are face concerns is a pattern where one starts indirectly and builds with directness. I began by selecting only those participants who used the most popular strategy first: "gauge

partner's response." Of the 51 (50.0%) people who began with "gauge partner's response," most (94.1%) reported using a second strategy as well. The most prominent second strategy was a "direct behavior" (52.1%). Twenty (39.2%) went on to use a third strategy with most reporting "persistence" (35.0%). The following case exemplifies this pattern:

> "First I asked him how he felt about anal sex, and when he seemed to give neutral or positive responses, I went on to say I would want to try it. He said he was hesitant and we still haven't tried it. I've been asking about it for 2 weeks, and he says he'll give it a try because I seem to really want to. So we will try it next time I see him."

Within this story reported by a female participant, the phrase "I asked him how he felt about anal sex" is an example of how some participants reported bringing up the topic in general. The comment does not suggest that she is asking to try it but rather that she is trying to gauge how he would respond. She even reports waiting for his response. At that point she continued to say "I would want to try it" which is a direct statement committing to her desire to engage in anal sex. Then she states "I've been asking about it for 2 weeks" which shows persistence by continuing to bring up the topic in some way.

Start direct: Direct to rationale. A second pattern examined began by examining those who used a direct strategy to begin the request. Thus, I selected only those who used one of the four behaviors that comprised the "direct behaviors" category. A frequency count showed that 36.3% of participants used direct behaviors. Of those participants (36.3%) that used direct strategies as their first attempt at getting something new, most (70.3%) did not report the use of a second strategy. Of those who reported only 1 direct strategy, 83.8% were effective. An example of such a story is shown below:

> "Because I don't masturbate, I knew I wanted my boyfriend to use one [vibrator] on me. We had been dating for 2 years so we're very comfortable discussing sex and fantasies w/one another. I told him this and the next thing I know we were in the car driving to the nearest fantasy store."

Within this example, one can see both the use of direct behaviors when she explains that she just told her boyfriend about wanting to use a vibrator when she states "I told him this." Another interesting aspect to what she states here is that they have "been dating for 2 years so we're very comfortable discussing sex and fantasies w/one another." This statement adds insight into possibly why she was able to be direct with her partner.

While approximately 70% did not use a second strategy when starting with a direct strategy, of those who did, most continued with the use of direct behaviors (27.3%) and the rest used a variety of strategies that centered on explaining or bargaining with a partner. Participants reported a variety of rationales such as suggesting that the act would be a favor, explaining how it would spice up their sex life or, suggested that they deserve the act because of previous behavior. Thus, while about half of the participants followed the typical pattern found in social influence literature, another third began with direct statements/behavior and either continued with direct statements/behaviors or offered rationales for the request.

Gender Patterns

I proposed a research question asking if there would be gender differences in types of strategies that people used to introduce something new. Although the sample had sufficient males and females (51% female), once data were coded there was insufficient *n* (with cell sizes less than 5 participants) for most categories to be used in an analysis of gender effects. Thus, I report gender analyses with sufficient *n* for the most popular first strategy.

Overall, females started with direct behaviors (46.2%) more than indirect behaviors. Males were much more likely to start with indirect behaviors (64.0%). I was interested in testing whether there was a significant difference between men and women and their use of direct and indirect behaviors to try something new; thus, I ran a one-sample t-test. Females (n= 24) were significantly more likely than males (n=13) to use "direct behaviors" [t (1, 36) = 20.72, p< .001] and, not surprisingly, males were significantly more likely than females (n=19) to "guage a partner's response,"[t(1, 50)= 20.07, p< .001]. Thus, while men and women will use both direct and indirect strategies, women were more likely to begin with direct and men were more likely to begin with indirect strategies.

Uncertainty

In the initial item, participants were asked to report about a time when they were *uncertain* about how their partners would respond. Thus, the third item asked participants to report why they were uncertain. The responses revealed a tautological response in that most of the participants reported that they were uncertain because they didn't know if their partner would want to do the act (32.6%). This is problematic because although it may seem as if the concern is about the partner, this is only speculation without understanding *why* they thought their partner might not do the act. For example, a participant may be worried that a partner may not want to do it because of the way the partner may view the individual asking for the new request which would be a more self focused concern. Samp and Solomon (1999) in a study on problematic events found that people reported more self-focused concerns during these situations.

In addition, approximately one-quarter of participants (24.5%) explained other concerns such as "may offend/upset/make partner uncomfortable." These two results suggest that there is a concern for the partner's response and desire of the act. Less popular reasons include being

uncertain because it was a new act for both of them/something they had never discussed before (8.2%) or reporting that talking about something new sexually was just a difficult thing to bring up (8.2%)**.** The rest of the reasons for being uncertain were reported less than 5% of the time. Because of the limitations presented by the manner in which the question was worded and the tautological responses, I did not do any further analysis using this data.

Discussion of Preliminary Results

The purpose of this preliminary study was to gain some initial insight on how people negotiate changes to a sexual routine. Findings suggest two general paths that participants took to influence their sexual partner to try a new sexual act and a variety of theoretical concepts that might help to explain these pathways. These paths and implications of this work will be described in detail below.

Start Slow

The first pattern that was observed started with a less intrusive type of strategy (such as being indirect) that was followed by more direct and sometimes even negative strategies. This pattern is similar to prior work in sexual communication on sexual scripts. As stated previously, the likelihood of sex occurring, based on a script, increases as people move through the script leading to a one-night stand (LaFrance, 2008). This increase in likelihood of sex occurring may be from the communicative behaviors becoming more direct and clear on the intention of having sex. The intention becomes much clearer from acts such as undressing a partner rather than kissing a partner. Perhaps, the participants within the current study are following a similar format but in a more condensed form. They start with an indirect strategy to see how a partner might respond (similar to giving a kiss in the script) and the messages become increasingly direct to portray the actual desire of trying something new.

Hunter and Boster‘s (1987) model of compliance-gaining messages suggests that individuals choose strategies based on the expected emotional effect of the message on the receiver. Positive strategies (such as hinting) are popular because they are less intrusive and will elicit a less negative emotional response from the listener. Hunter and Boster (1987) further posit that the more positive the response a compliance gaining message is likely to elicit, then the more acceptable it would be to use; thus, more people would be willing to use the message strategy. When considering the most popular first message type used by the participants in the preliminary study, one can see that the individuals within the study reported strategies that are likely to be considered more positive (such as hinting) suggesting that possibly this idea of a threshold is explaining the use of indirect strategies.

However, we need to contextualize Hunter and Boster’s explanation of how people choose strategies within sexual communication. I found that people used strategies such as hinting, joking, and bringing up the topic in general in order to gauge a partner’s response. The situation was established to elicit a response about a time when the participant was uncertain. Thus, the participants were likely aware that the use of these strategies could elicit negative responses. For example, the question “how do you feel about anal sex?” may likely elicit a response such as “Gross! People who do that are crazy!” However, in this situation, the persuader has not committed to the desire to engage in the act and at this point may still maintain a positive face by agreeing with the listener. In this scenario, perhaps the persuader is *more* concerned with the type of response than the possibility of eliciting a negative response. Rather, the indirect message was used to reduce uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and predict how the partner would respond to a direct request for the sexual act. Thus, I suggest the process is more complex than avoiding negative responses. Although, they hope for a positive response, the message intentions

were first to determine how a partner would respond to a statement of desire of engaging in the specific act. Thus, the persuader is intentionally ambiguous to reduce uncertainty and make a follow up request using direct behaviors. In this scenario, the persuader is concerned with negative responses in order to decrease uncertainty and predict future behavior.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that to reduce uncertainty people will increase communication (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Furthermore, Predicted Outcome Value Theory (Sunnafrank, 1988) would suggest that not only are people choosing these strategies to reduce uncertainty but to predict future responses. Perhaps being indirect at the onset of the request helps the individuals to reduce uncertainty and anxiety in a manner that will reflect favorably on them and allow them to determine how their partner will respond. By not committing to wanting the act they may refrain from imposing on the partner as well as refrain from judgment from the partner. This pattern may be a form of reducing uncertainty and predicting responses of a partner.

Direct Requests

A second pattern found for approximately a third of the preliminary respondents was quite different than the typical compliance gaining response pattern. A large percentage of participants (36.3%) self-reported that they began with a direct request, statement or action with direct action being the most common form of direct behaviors during the first attempt. These direct strategies proved to be successful with 83.8% of everyone that started with a direct behavior getting what they wanted and 64.5% of those participants got what they wanted on the first try.[1]

Feeling confident that one's partner will respond at least with an open-mind or non-judgmentally may contribute to an individuals' ability to be direct. Perhaps the participants that

used direct strategies have a feeling of confidence in how their partner would respond that helped them to be direct. One factor that may help participants predict partner's reaction is the establishment of open communication within the relationship. Many participants (without prompting) suggested that there was an established rule within their relationship of open discussion about sex. One participant even suggested that her relationship with her partner was not the "norm" because they were able to talk about their sex life.

This feeling of certainty may help to explain some of the gendered differences as well. People may feel as if women have control over many aspects of an established sexual relationship. Harvey, Bird, Galavotti, Duncan, and Greenberg (2002) found that women were significantly more likely to report themselves as having more control over when to have sex than their male partners. Perhaps women feel as if they have the ability to be direct because they are viewed as the "gatekeepers" within a sexual relationship (Sprecher, Regan, McKinney, Maxwell, & Wazienski, 1997) and view their partner as being sexually available. Within our society, there is a belief in the sexual double standard that suggests women should be sexually timid (Milhausen & Herold, 1999) except in the context of a relationship (Sprecher, et al., 1997). Within the current study, women were more likely than men to use direct strategies. Greer and Buss (1994) found that people know that direct strategies for initiating sex are more *effective* for women than men but women do not use these strategies. Perhaps once the sexual relationship becomes more established, women become more confident to use direct strategies because they see their partners as sexually available and became more confident about their partner's response.

Relational Context

An interesting finding is that few people wrote about concerns about the relationship in either the initial story or when asked why they were uncertain about the request. This lack of finding should not be interpreted as suggesting that individuals were willing to risk losing the relationship but rather participants did not seem to be concerned—at least in their text-- that introducing something new may put the relationship at risk. In addition, few reported concerns for losing the relationship when asked why they were uncertain about the partner's response to their new sexual request. These responses suggest that most of the individuals were likely not concerned about negative effects the new request may have on the relationship, perhaps because most participants reported they were in a serious/exclusive relationship, a relationship type that is likely less threatened by a new sexual request than one where partners have less knowledge of each other and less certainty of the future of the relationship.

The context of the relationship may have important implications for the results. As a relationship progresses, intimacy typically increases and communication becomes more open (Altman & Taylor, 1970). Because many of the individuals were in committed relationships, this may have contributed to a more open and direct form of communication with sexual desires. This open communication may be the result of a rule established about sexual communication within the relationship or because the couple may be open in all aspects of communication within their relationship.

Another important issue relevant to the type of relationship is the generally held assumption that if one is in a committed relationship, one does not have sex outside of that relationship (despite data that suggests high numbers of cheating, Peluso, 2007). This assumption

may help to explain the use of multiple strategies reported. Because a person is not supposed to get sexual needs met outside the relationship, he or she may be more likely to persist.

Summary

There are several different factors that may contribute to the manner in which people will introduce a new sexual act to a relationship. While the use of indirect behaviors may be a combination of reducing uncertainty and predicting responses, the use of direct behaviors may be a sense of certainty about a partner's response. These data seem to highlight a desire to know *how* a partner will respond before making a request which seems logical considering the embarrassment, shame and fear of rejection that can be involved with discussing sex.

In summary, I noted two substantially different influence patterns: One following the more typical compliance gaining pattern of indirect/positive to more direct/negative strategies, the second starting with a directive and occasionally followed with more directives or rationales. The first pattern requires more strategy steps to get compliance and less certainty involved with how a partner would respond based on relational history.

Limitations

Although this study was very insightful into the types of strategies people use to initiate a new sexual situation to a relationship, there were some weaknesses. First, the participants, on average, reported being in a relationship for slightly over 10 months (with a median of 6 months) at the time of the request and were recruited from a college campus. In the future it would be useful to recruit couples who are married or have been committed to each other much longer as this dynamic may change the manner in which the couple communicates. Furthermore, because the research was exploratory the questions were only intended to provide insight into the

strategies that people use; thus, future studies will benefit by asking participants to explain why they used the strategy they did.

Another limitation to this study within the methodology is asking participants to report on a situation in which they were uncertain about how a partner would respond. Clearly, by asking participants to report about a situation where they were *uncertain,* I created a situation with a bias towards remembering a more difficult request or one where the individual was more mindful or thoughtful. In such situations, individuals may be more likely to be indirect and/or use more complex messages. The uncertainty frame likely contributed to the high number of individuals that started with "gauge partner's response." In the future, contrasting results for "the most recent time" and "a time when they were uncertain about their partner's response" may provide a fuller understanding of the role that uncertainty plays in message production of sexual situations.

Conclusion

When initiating discussion of trying a new sexual act with their sexual partner, people are concerned about the desires of their partner or at the very least are concerned with whether a partner would reject a new sexual request. The preliminary study was intended to encourage them to talk about an inherently face-threatening situation and yet despite this fact more than a third of the participants still chose to use direct behavior either in the form of verbal or nonverbal behavior. Using directives, specifically a truncated version without any explanation for doing the act, undermines the assumption that people attempt to mitigate face threats. Rather there is something else influencing the strategy choices people use to get their partner to try something new sexually. Perhaps the function of knowing how a partner would respond prior to initiating the request helps a partner to be more direct. Furthermore, stereotypical beliefs of gendered

sexual functioning may explain the gender differences that were found with the use of different strategies.

Endnotes

1. As a post hoc analysis of the data I was interested in what the most successful strategies within the data were and whether any strategy was successful 100% of the time. Of the first strategies that were reported as being used by more than two participants, alcohol and direct action were the only two methods that were successful 100% of the time when this was the first message sent. This was based on a crosstabs analysis.

CHAPTER 3

MAIN STUDY: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Results from the preliminary study suggest that young adults typically begin with either an indirect strategy or a direct one. The purpose of the main study is to examine factors that contribute to the likelihood of starting with direct or indirect strategies. As will be argued below, the compliance- gaining episodes from the preliminary study show that one's ability to predict a partner's *response* to the request is likely to be a critical factor in choosing one pattern over another. Predicted Outcome Value Theory (POV), a theory of interpersonal communication, will be the foundation for predicting the first strategy used to initiate a new sexual act. This dissertation will be testing those constructs that likely produce positive predicted outcomes in sexual encounters (e.g., relational sexual self-disclosure, intimacy, sexual availability of men, past sexual experience). Towards that goal, Chapter Three first provides a review of the literature on POV, a conceptualization of two important POV concepts (uncertainty and valence of predicted outcome) and hypotheses concerning POVs effect on strategy selection. Second, relational and sexual factors expected to affect both predicted outcome values and strategy choice are explicated and hypotheses formulated.

Predicted Outcome Value Theory

My assumption is that a primary concern of people making a new sexual request is predicting how a partner will communicatively respond to a statement of desiring the new act. Predicted Outcomes Value (POV) theory is a theory that examines how people predict communicative responses of others and how these predicted outcomes affect subsequent

communicative behaviors. As such, POV seems a useful theory to understand this process of predicting behavior.

Predicted Outcome Value (POV) theory was a modification of Berger and Calabrese's (1975) seminal Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). As such, several of the underlying URT assumptions and concepts are relevant to POV and therefore I first provide a brief review of URT. URT is based on the assumption that when strangers meet, individuals have a desire to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability of their own behavior and the other's behavior as well. The term *uncertainty* refers to the ability of someone to predict the most likely alternative to how another will behave within a communicative event. For example, a person with low uncertainty is able to narrow the number of possibilities in which the other person will respond which, in turn, allows the individual to narrow the possibilities of one's own behavior. On the other hand, a person with high uncertainty would have a large repertoire in which they may predict the other individual to behave and thus, would be unsure of how they should act.

The basic premise of URT suggests that people increase communication to reduce uncertainty and that as communication increases uncertainty decreases. Predicted outcome value (POV) theory updates URT and assumes that people's desires go beyond that of reducing uncertainty to *maximizing relational outcomes.* POV suggests that people continue to communicate only if there are positive predicted outcomes associated with the future of the interaction and the relationship (Sunnafrank, 1986). Because POV is concerned with predicting outcomes, a focus is on future probabilities of behaviors (Honeycutt, 1993). That is individuals are concerned with what the future of an interaction will bring beyond the current moment in time. People will evaluate the probability of future behaviors occurring and determine whether these behaviors are positive or negative. Sunnafrank (1986) notes reduction of uncertainty can be

a good thing however if the interaction does not go as desired, if the individual learns things s/he did not want to know, or if someone is hurt, then uncertainty reduction can be negative. Based on the valence of the predicted outcomes, one determines how to proceed at the current point in time. For this dissertation, the concept of future probabilities is important, as the results of the preliminary study suggested that many people were trying to gauge a partner's reaction to a particular sexual act before requesting the act. Thus, they were attempting to predict the probability of a partner engaging in the desired act which would create a positive or negative future outcome.

POV argues that individuals limit communication when behavioral uncertainty reduction produces tentative judgments that are negative whereas communication continues and possibly increases if an individual believed there to be some reward or positive outcome (e.g., compliance). POV proposes that one attempts to produce outcome maximization by utilizing initial impressions within the interaction to guide future communication (Sunnafrank, 1988). Uncertainty about behavior is relatively high upon first encounters, but if future contact is likely, people seek to reduce uncertainty to predict the value of the outcomes (Sunnafrank, 1986). Judgments that *future* outcomes will be positive help the individual to "continue the interaction and relationship at the entry level, attempt to terminate or restrict the interaction and relationship, or seek to escalate the interaction and relationship" (Sunnafrank, 1986, p. 12). Moreover, these predictions are used to determine *how* to proceed with the interaction and relationship in order to maximize positive outcomes.

POV is a complex theory with seven propositions. Proposition One has especial relevance for this dissertation as the process of predicting future outcomes to determine how to continue an interaction is highlighted within this proposition. Proposition One states that "people

will continue to increase communication when positive predictions are made but in the event of negative predicted outcomes, communication will decrease" (Sunnafrank, 1986, p. 14). When considering the current study, this would suggest that positive predicted outcomes are likely to increase communication. Furthermore, this highlights that expectations of positive or negative outcomes contribute to the future behavior enacted within a specific interaction and not just future interactions.

While POV was originally designed to explain initial interactions, it has been used and shown useful in relationships outside of initial interactions. Indeed, in the initial test of POV, Sunnafrank (1988) proposes that the theory be tested outside the context of initial interactions. Bippus, Kearney, Plax, and Brooks (2003) showed the utility of POV in a teacher/student setting to understand students' willingness to participate in out-of-class communication with teachers. Because POV allows for the use of a variety of communication cues to predict future interactions, Bippus et al. (2003) expected students to use the classroom behaviors of teachers in order to predict one-on-one interactions during office hours. They found students assessed teachers' accessibility and mentoring ability during class and approached those teachers that they predicted had the potential to mentor them. Although this test of POV does not extend to intimate ongoing relationships, this study offers some insight into relationships beyond initial interactions. Specifically this research shows that people reflect on previous interactions to create positive or negative expectations for other interactions.

A more recent study (Ramirez, Sunnafrank, & Goei, 2009) examined romantic relationships and friendships to test basic premises of POV and the effects of unexpected events on predicted outcome values. These authors found that positive predicted outcomes for the future of a relationship positively correlates with attraction, perceived similarity, liking, intimacy of

communication, amount of communication and overall contact, and general information seeking. More importantly, they also found that changes in predicted outcome values positively correlated with changes in attraction, perceived similarity, amount of communication and overall contact, and general information seeking behavior. These results show that as predicted outcome values change so do many relational behaviors.

POV has primarily been tested to predict how people rate future interactions and the future of a relationship (e.g., Bippus et al., 2003; Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004; Sunnafrank, 1988; Ramirez et al., 2009) and the effects of predicted outcome values on various relational variables including communication. Although this research has looked at communication variables (e.g., amount of information-seeking, amount of communication) the focus of POV work is typically not on how predicted outcomes affect types of messages *within the current interaction*. One notable exception is Grove and Werkman's (1991) work that examined communication specific outcomes within an interaction by testing how people respond to visibly disabled and able-bodied individuals. They found that able-bodied individuals asked fewer questions to visibly disabled people. Gudykunst, Gao, Schmidt, Nishida, Bond, Leung, et al. (1992) found similar results in a test of POV across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. They discovered that positive outcomes were associated with more self-disclosure during an interaction in both types of cultures. These two studies support a direct link between positive predicted outcomes and communication behavior within an interaction.

Within the context of requesting a partner to try a new sexual act, I suggest two predicted outcomes (POV) are relevant: a communication POV and a sexual behavior POV. A communication POV may be that my partner will treat me kindly and with an open mind even if

he or she ultimately says no to the request. Thus, while one would expect the communication and sexual behavior POVs to positively correlate, it is not necessarily the case that they will do so.

Key Concept in POV theory: Uncertainty

Before a person can predict an outcome of a communication interaction, one must first have a referent point from which to make predictions. POV assumes that reducing uncertainty is a concern of individuals (Sunnafrank, 1986) and most interpersonal researchers assume that all social interactions have *some* degree of uncertainty (Berger & Gudykunst, 1991). Knobloch and colleagues' (2004; 2006; 2008) work nicely illustrates that close relationships can often be fraught with uncertainty. In fact, Knobloch (2008) found that uncertainty about sex was one of the top ten topics of uncertainty reported by married couples (e.g., whether sex will continue as they age; if a partner's needs are met; amount of physical intimacy). Her work suggests that uncertainty likely plays a key role when a partner desires to try a new sexual act. Similar to Berger and Gudykunst (1991) a fundamental assumption of the current project is that the initiator has *some* degree of uncertainty about how the partner will communicatively respond to the request and whether a partner will engage in the act.

There is an abundance of research on uncertainty in particular to the manner in which Knobloch and Solomon (1999) conceptualize uncertainty. Research on uncertainty has shown that there are at least three different types of uncertainty within relationships: self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty (Berger & Bradac, 1982; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). *Self uncertainty* pertains to the ambiguity involved with an individual's own involvement within a relationship (e.g., How certain am I about how important the relationship is to me?). *Partner uncertainty* involves the questions pertaining to a partner's involvement in a relationship (e.g., How certain am I about how important this relationship is to my partner?) and *relational*

uncertainty involves those questions at the dyadic level of the relationship beyond partner and self (e.g., questions about the definition of the relationship?). While these three terms are conceptually distinct, they invariably correlate quite highly (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Although this conceptualization of uncertainty is useful to understanding behaviors in relationships, I am most concerned with uncertainty as it refers to behavioral predictions. Recall in the description of POV theory, uncertainty refers to ability to predict the *behaviors* of another individual. The current study is most concerned with predicting how a partner will respond to a request of trying something new sexually; thus, uncertainty will be behavioral uncertainty as presented by POV and established by Berger and Calabrese (1975).

According to POV, uncertainty does play a role in an individual's initial willingness to engage in communication with another. The theory further posits that those with a high level of behavioral uncertainty about a partner's communicative or behavioral response are likely to tailor their messages to reduce that uncertainty (Sunnafrank, 1986). In fact research on relational uncertainty has even found a negative relationship between uncertainty and explicitness of a date request (Knobloch, 2006) which suggests that not just behavioral uncertainty affects directness of communication. Using this research on date request and POV theory as guidance, I expect as certainty about a partner's response increases an individual will be more likely to use direct strategies than indirect strategies when first introducing something new sexually:

H1: As behavioral uncertainty increases about a partner's response, directness of strategies used to influence the partner to try a new sexual behavior will decrease.

Key Concept in POV theory: Valence of Predicted Outcome

The critical decision in POV is whether one anticipates a predicted outcome as positive or negative. Much of the research that has used POV as a theoretical foundation has shown that

predictions of outcomes should not be conceived as dichotomous (positive or negative) but rather scaled as a degree of positivity (e.g., Bippus et al., 2003; Mottet, 2000; Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004). Furthermore, research has shown that the degree of positive predictions is positively correlated with relational factors such as liking and intimacy and communication factors such as amount of communication and information seeking (Mottet, 2000). In general this variance of predicted outcomes should hold true in a sexual situation and the degree of positivity should affect communication in much the same way as previous research has shown (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1991).

Given the relational context for a request for a sexual act, I expect people to discontinue a request only in the case of an extremely negative response from a partner. Consider, for example, how a negative response such as the following may be construed: One requests oral sex and the partner replies "Um, not sure if I'm into that." Such a statement can be taken as "no," s/he is not going to get involved with oral sex or the initiator can focus on the "um, not sure" part and ask again later, indicating the importance of the behavior in another plea. Thus, I suggest that although an individual initially may predict a slightly negative future outcome, s/he will realize that the opportunity to get the desired sexual behavior may still exist. The act is something that the individual wants and as long as the individual believes there to be an opportunity, s/he will likely continue to predict positive outcomes. The more likely an individual believes the request to be fulfilled the higher the predicted outcome and possibly the more effort an individual is willing to use to get the desired outcome. Thus, I suspect that the more positive predicted outcome an individual has *after* the initial message, the more persistent an individual will be to get the requested sexual act.

Although a positive predicted outcome is likely to elicit persistence by an individual, the exclusivity of the relationship is likely to affect the correlation between predicted outcomes and persistence. The term exclusive refers to a relationship as one in which no other parties are involved in the relationship, typically in the form of sexual fidelity. Although conceptually distinct, relationship exclusivity correlates with commitment. In fact, Bachman and Guerrero (2006) found that people who engaged in infidelity reported low levels of commitment. When considering the context of the current study, this becomes an important factor because with many compliance-gaining situations a person is able to go beyond the relationship to fulfill a need (e.g., borrowing money, getting a ride, or asking for advice). However, the expectation of fidelity in an exclusive relationship may prevent an individual from pursuing a new sexual desire with others. Because a sexual request in an exclusive relationship is something only a partner can fulfill, an individual may become more adamant about requesting the sexual act. Thus, it would be expected that people who report being in an exclusive relationship may be more inclined to persist with a request when a partner initially resists if the requester still perceives positive predicted outcomes. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: A positive relationship between positive predicted outcomes after the initial request and persistence will be stronger for those in exclusive relationships than those in casual relationships.

Factors that Affect Predicted Outcomes

Preliminary results showed that majority of participants reported about a time in which they were in a committed or dating relationship. I suggest there are several implications for this influence episode when people are making the request in an *established* romantic relationship. I propose examining two *relational* factors (intimacy and history of sexual disclosure with this

partner) and two *sexual* factors (an individuals' sexual history and use of sexual stereotypes) will affect predicted outcomes and/or the use of a direct or indirect initial strategy choice.

Relational Factors

Intimacy. One relational factor that will likely influence a sexual request is the level of intimacy reported within the relationship. According to Sternberg (1986) intimacy is an emotional component of love that refers to a feeling of closeness and connectedness. Other research has suggested that intimacy refers to the quality of self-disclosure in close relationships (Emmers-Sommer, 2004). However, self-disclosing details of one's life often leads to a feeling of closeness; thus the study was interested in intimacy as a measure of closeness and self-disclosure. Essentially intimacy is the feeling that one has when s/he can share personal information, desires reciprocation of self-disclosure from the partner, desires to seek the person out for companionship, and cares for the well-being of the partner.

Intimacy has long been part of research in various relationship types and is linked to many relational qualities. For instance, Sanderson, Rahm, and Beigbeder (2005) found that high levels of intimacy were positively associated with social support, self-disclosure, and constructive conflict resolution among friends. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) found that couples who reported high levels of satisfaction reported higher levels of intimacy than couples who reported low levels of satisfaction. Research using URT has found a negative association between partner uncertainty and intimacy (Douglas, 1984; Parks & Adelman, 1983) and that openness about uncertainty can increase closeness in a relationship (Berger & Bradac, 1982).

Not only can changes in uncertainty impact intimacy, but changes in intimacy can be the cause of uncertainty. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) suggested that increases of intimacy in relationships can create uncertainty when both people are not sure about the level of

commitment. They found that people would avoid talking about the nature of their relationship when mutuality of feelings was unclear. Knobloch and Solomon (2004) found that as intimacy increases, interference from a partner also increases such that these partners would prevent individuals from achieving daily goals, disrupt the daily routine, and interfere with plans. However, the relationship between intimacy and perceptions of partner interference was curvilinear in that eventually the interference tapers off. Other research has documented this curvilinear effect between intimacy and communication. Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) found people report more topic avoidance in relationships that are moderately intimate than at low or high levels of intimacy. Furthermore, research on dating found a similar curvilinear relationship between intimacy and explicitness of the date request (Solomon, 1997). These results are consistent with the relational turbulence model which posits that early in a relationship societal rules govern relationships but as intimacy increases the relationship becomes uncertain and this creates turbulence (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). As the relationship progresses further rules are established within the relationship and relational uncertainty recedes.

Thus, while intimacy can be a good thing in relationships, it can also create difficulties. The research above shows how intimacy has an impact on behaviors exhibited in a relationship. People who have high levels of intimacy may feel more comfortable with partners and be more willing to express sexual desires. At the same time, depending on where partners are in a relationship, intimacy may create trouble and feelings of uncertainty. People at moderate levels of intimacy may become worried about how a partner will respond to a new request and worry about judgment from a partner which might affect the future of the relationship. Consistent with previous research it is expected that intimacy will have a curvilinear relationship with message directness.

H3: Intimacy and message directness will be curvilinearly correlated such that people will be indirect at moderate levels of intimacy.

However, these correlations of intimacy and message directness may not translate to the relationship between intimacy and predicted outcome values. In fact people high in intimacy may be less likely to predict positive outcome values because they may believe a partner will be suspicious as to where they learned the new sexual position. Because the relationship between intimacy and POV is unclear, it will be proposed as a research question:

RQ1: Does intimacy effect how positive a person predicts outcome values to be prior to initiating something new sexually?

History of sexual self-disclosure in the relationship. Another factor that likely affects strategy use is prior experience in disclosing about sex within that relationship. POV research has shown that people use previous interactions to predict future behavior (e.g., Bippus et al., 2003; Ramirez et al., in press). As such, there are unique relational attributes that may contribute to the request of something new. Many people may turn to their relational history of self-disclosure about sex to predict the outcomes of bringing up a new sexual topic.

Within relationships people establish rules for the functioning of that relationship and one area in which people may establish rules is the discussion of sexual topics. Self-disclosing sexual likes and dislikes to a partner leads to greater sexual satisfaction and fewer sexual problems (Byers & Demmons, 1999; Metts & Cupach, 1989; Russell, 1990). Rubin, Hill, Peplau, and Dunkel-Schetter (1980) found that college students who were more romantically involved with their partner and those whose partner evinced higher self-disclosure reported more extensive sexual communication with their partner. Herold and Way (1988) report commitment and frequency of sexual activity positively correlated with an increase in sexual-self disclosure.

If a relationship has a history of open communication about sex in general, then asking for something new may come more easily to those in the relationship and they may find it easier then to make direct requests. Open communication about sex in the relationship will likely elicit positive predicted outcomes with a new sexual request allowing the individual to be open and direct with a request. Note the differentiation between a positive communication POV and a positive sexual behavior POV. A positive communication POV may be that my partner will treat me kindly and with an open mind even if he or she ultimately says no to the request.

H4: As comfort with sexual communication increases, people will report more positive predicted outcomes prior to initiating a new sexual request.

H5: Increases in comfort with sexual communication will positively correlate with directness of the first strategy used to get a partner to try something new.

Sexual Behavior and Stereotypes

Past sexual behavior. As suggested earlier, people often use previous experiences to predict future behavior, and this will likely hold true even outside the current relationship. People have many experiences outside the context of their current relationship and may rely on these previous experiences to determine behaviors in current or future relationships. Research on sexual behaviors is an area that highlighted the relevance of past experiences on future behavior. For instance, past experiences predict intentions to use condoms and future condom use (e.g., Albarracin, Fishbein, Johnson, & Muellerleile, 2001). Quina, Harlow, Morokoff , Burkholder & Deiter (2000) found women who had more prior sexual experience were more likely to talk to their current partners about their sexual needs and desires. Research on sexual assertiveness among women has also highlighted the importance of past experiences in that women who have more sexual experiences are more likely to be sexually assertive (Morokoff et al., 1997). This

study found that women who frequently engaged in sexual contact (e.g., sexual experiences such as kissing, fondling, and intercourse) were more likely to initiate sex. This research suggest that women have more opportunities to be sexually assertive and can use past experiences to become comfortable and perfect strategies for initiating sexual encounters.

This literature on past experiences shows that previous relationships or sexual encounters may contribute to an individual feeling less uncertainty and more positive about a partner's response at the onset of a request. Thus, these individuals with more experience will lead them to more positive expectations prior to discussing the topic with a partner. Because they expect positive reactions from a partner, they will be able to be more assertive or direct. Thus the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: The more sexually experienced a person is the more likely s/he will report positive predicted outcomes prior to making a request.

H7: The more sexually experienced a person is the more direct they will be initiating a new sexual request.

Sexual stereotyping. Finally, an experience that might also affect the manner in which people communicate a sexual request is the belief in sexual stereotyping. People often have preconceived notions of how typical men and women behave or should behave in a sexual relationship. Studies show the people have scripts for sexual episodes (e.g., Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1993) that create expectations that people often use to predict their own and other's behaviors. A prominent script throughout the sexual literature is that women are the gatekeepers of sex and men are sexually aggressive (e.g., Sprecher, et al., 1997). These scripts typically create a sexual double standard that restricts women's behavior and creates an expectation that men are sexually promiscuous.

Being in a relationship creates an exception to the sexual double standard (Gagnon, 1990) in that people consider it more acceptable for women to be sexually active and assertive in a committed relationship. Other research has even suggested that women perceive themselves as having more control over aspects of intercourse such as timing and have equal control in determining the type of sex that a couple has (Harvey et al., 2002). Furthermore, because men are considered to be sexually assertive and promiscuous, women may have an expectation that men always desire sex. This can present a situation in which women become more comfortable being direct because they are confident their partner will want sex, providing a rationale for the finding in the preliminary study that women were more likely than were males to start with direct strategies. Women who believe in the stereotype that men are always willing to engage in sex will be more likely to predict positive outcomes and use direct behaviors with the suggestion of something new:

H8: The more women stereotype men as being sexually available, the more positive they will predict the outcome of a new sexual request.

H9: The more women stereotype men as being sexually available, the more direct they will be with their initial message to introduce something new sexually.

Summary

This dissertation uses predicted outcome values (POV) and relational and sexual factors to understand how people will request something new in a sexual relationship. While some individuals will rely on past experience and available information on cultural expectations to reduce uncertainty prior to the interaction, others will rely more on partner's responses within the interaction itself. The next chapter presents a method for testing these hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Participants

Two hundred and thirty two participants were solicited from introductory speech communication courses at a large southern university or through snowball sampling of friends and family. For participants to be eligible they had to be or have been sexually active. Incentive for participating in this project was an opportunity to enhance ones understanding of their own sexual communication and, in addition, students in speech communication courses received extra credit or it fulfilled a course research requirement.

Of the 232 participants 53% were female and the majority of participants were white (81.9%). Of the remaining participants, 10.3% reported their ethnicity as Black/African American and 3.0% reported their ethnicity as Asian. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 56 and the mean age was 22.53 (*SD*= 5.99; *Mdn* = 21). The length of time the couples had been together at the time of the new request ranged from less than one month to 24 years (*M* months = 15.32, *SD*= 30.48, *Mdn* = 6.5). The vast majority of participants identified themselves as heterosexual (95.2%) and on average reported having had 4.33 (*SD*= 5.23, *Mdn* = 2.0) partners at the time of the request. No minors or members of any vulnerable populations participated and the university's IRB approved these procedures.

Procedure

Pilot test. Before recruiting participants, the survey was piloted four times to ensure the utility of the survey and more specifically the accuracy of the wording of the strategies. There was some difficulty in wording of the message strategies as pilot participants would write or

approach me after taking the survey stating that the wording of the strategies were "too harsh" or that people wouldn't use a specific strategy because it was "too mean" when talking to someone about sex. Words such as bargain, threaten, and persist had to be removed from the statements. The study was piloted on 147 participants from upper level speech communication courses to get the wording and order of the strategies so that it most accurately represented how participants perceived the situation.

Student population recruitment. Participants (n = 196) signed up at a date and time that was convenient for them to participate. Upon arrival, students signed in to receive research credit (or extra credit) for their participation. A researcher explained the nature of the study and verbally described and distributed consent forms. Students had the opportunity to review the consent forms and ask questions. To assure anonymity, there was a waiver of informed consent signature; participants consented by submitting the survey. After completion of the survey, participants were debriefed, thanked and then released. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete and no one reported problems during data collection.

Non-student population recruitment. I worked diligently to obtain an older, non-student population. People who were at least 30 were targeted; however, no one over the age of 18 was excluded. The non-student sample was obtained through two procedures. First, I approached people I knew who were over 30. They were asked if they were interested in participating and/or if they knew anyone else who might be interested in participating. After I explained the survey and if they still wanted to participate, they were given a survey, consent form, and debriefing sheet in an envelope to take home as well as any additional materials they requested for others who might participate. They were asked to complete the survey and return it sealed in the

envelope to a box in the main office of the Speech Communication Department. Of the fifty surveys distributed, only seventeen were completed and returned, a 34% response rate.

Online recruitment. To increase the number of non-students, the main study was posted to a popular online survey vendor (surveymonkey.com). The author sent the URL as a link in an email to friends and family members over the age of 30 and they were asked to pass along the URL to others over 30. Survey Monkey collected the responses on a secure, downloadable database. The researcher sent the email to approximately 60 people with many others passing the URL to others. While 114 people *started* the online survey, only 19 completed it, thus the on-line survey had a 16.66% response rate. Overall, the attempt to recruit people over 30 yielded minimal responses and possible reasons for the poor response rate will be addressed in the discussion section.

Dependent Variables

A copy of the measurement, informational letter, and debriefing forms are found in Appendix B.

Communicative strategies. To determine how people initiated a new sexual act in an established sexual relationship, participants reported on the most recent experience of introducing a new sexual act. First, they described an episode in which they approached a partner about trying something new. They were given a page to report all verbal and nonverbal behaviors they used to get their partner to try something new as well as any responses given by the partner. Participants were asked to write about the experience in order to prime their memory and make the experience more vivid before answering the items used to test hypotheses.

Participants were then shown a list of seventeen strategies, plus an 'other' category and (see p. 2 of Appendix B for the list). The list of strategies was derived from results in the preliminary study. The minimal use of the "other" strategy (n= 5, .4%) where participants were

able to write in what they did/said helps to provide evidence of the utility of the list provided to participants. Directions stated:

> Refer back to your story and circle below *anything* you did or said from this list. Circle only those that you remember doing and saying specific to this experience based on your story.

Strategy order and strategy directness. After participants indicated which statements were used to get a partner to try something new sexually, they were asked to rank the order in which each strategy was used. The following directions were provided to elicit responses about the order of strategies used:

> **Refer back to the things you did and said that you just circled.** Indicate below which thing you did *first* by putting the letter next to "First" below. Then, figure out what you did *second,* and write that down next to second below. Please rank the ones that you circled in the order in which they were said or done to the best of your ability. Leave any extra spaces empty if you used less than five.
>
> First_____, Second_____, Third, _____, Fourth_____, Fifth_____

Finally, because hypotheses were concerned with level of directness, each of the strategies used in the main study were assigned a level of directness (1-7; 1 = very indirect; 7=very direct) by the author and a master student in speech communication blind to the hypotheses of the study using the codebook provided in Appendix C. The author and the coder agreed on the level of directness for 15 of the 17 strategies ($\kappa = .72$).

To gain some insight into how direct participants perceived their strategies to be, a measure of directness was also provided by participants. After participants reported what order they used each strategy type they circled, they were asked to report how direct each strategy they used was on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1= very indirect; 7= very direct).

Persistence. Persistence was measured as a function of the number of strategies people reported within the forced choice strategies described above; the more strategies that were reported the more persistent an individual was considered to be.

Predicted outcome value. To measure predicted outcome values, I first referred to a scale used by Bippus et al. (2003), adapted from Shepard (1996). The scale consisted of nine semantic differential items (e.g., how boring- interesting the outcome would be) and showed good internal consistency (α= .94). Although this scale was useful as guidance for constructing the current measure of predicted outcome values, I was interested in differentiating types of predicted outcome values; thus, modified the Bippus et al. (2003) scale significantly.

The measure of predicted outcome values for the current study consisted of 14 Likert-type items that asked participants how strongly they agree with each statement (1= Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree). Seven items measures predicted outcome values for *talking* with a partner about trying something new sexually, (POV-Talk; e.g., my partner would be happy *to talk* about the possibility of a new sexual act). The same seven items measured predicted outcome values for a partner's willingness to *try* something new sexually (POV-Try) by changing the wording from "talk" to "try," (e.g., my partner would be happy *to try* the new sexual act). Individuals completed these fourteen items considering how they expected their partner to respond *prior* to initiating any behavior (referred to as Time 1). In addition, to gauge the predicted outcome values after initiating the request for something new (referred to as Time 2) participants were asked to "think about how your partner *actually responded* to what you initially did or said. Based on your partner's response indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement." See Appendix B, pages 3-4 for the POV items and exact instructions.

Independent Variables

Behavioral uncertainty. Knobloch's (2002; 2004; 2008) research on uncertainty was examined to develop a measure of how certain an individual was about a partner's response to a new sexual request. The items presented by Knobloch were used as guidance; however, I was

interested in gaining a more gestalt observation of behavioral uncertainty for how a partner would communicatively respond to a request and for how willing they expected a partner to engage in the act. Thus, six semantic differential items were developed to measure behavioral uncertainty about a partner's response. Participants were asked how sure/unsure, certain/uncertain and insecure/confident they were about their partner's interest in *talking* about the new sexual act. They then completed the same three scales for how interested their partner would be in *trying* the new sexual act. See items 10-15 in Appendix B.

Intimacy. While a variety of intimacy measures exist in the literature, Rubin's (1970) operationalization is used most often. Rubin's measure has nine items measured on a 7-pt Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree, see items 52-60 in Appendix B). Sample items include: I feel that I can confide in this person about virtually everything. I would do anything for this person. If I could never be with this person, I would feel miserable. Participants were directed to consider how they felt about their partner at the time they asked the partner to try something new sexually when completing the intimacy items. Prior research shows the scale has good predictive, convergent and divergent validity as well as good internal consistency reliability with Cronbach α scores usually ranging around .90 - .93 (see, e.g., Cloven & Roloff, 1994; Knobloch, Solomon, & Theiss, 2006; Rubin, 1970).

Past sexual experience. One item assessed how many sexual partners the participant had in their lifetime at the time of the sexual request.

Male sexual availability. Clements-Schreiber et al., (1998) scale of male sexual availability was used. The scale consists of seven items measured on a 7-pt. Likert scale (1= strongly disagree; 7= strongly agree; items 73-79). The instructions read, "Sometimes people have beliefs for how men behave in regards to heterosexual sex. For the following questions, circle how strongly you agree with the each statement." Sample items include, "If a woman wants to have sex, she

can expect a male partner to make himself available to her;" "Men will not pass up a sexual opportunity;" and "Men appreciate all sexual opportunity." The internal consistency of this scale in the one study that I found that used it was acceptable (α=.72; Clements-Shreiber et al., 1998).

Sexual communication. Often researchers use either Byers and Demmons (1999) or Snell's (1997) sexual self disclosure scales. However, these scales are specific to particular aspects of self- disclosure rather than a general assessment of how comfortable people are with communicating about sexual topics. Thus, I adapted questions from Lemieux and Hale's (1999) intimacy scale that pertained to self-disclosure to address sexual communication (e.g., My partner and I share sexual information with each other). Then using Snell's scale as guidance, I added the following four items:

My partner and I talk to each other about a variety of sexual topics
My partner and I are open about sexual communication
My partner and I consider sex to be a taboo topic
My partner and I have difficulty discussing most sexual topics

Thus, a total of eight items were used to measure this concept (items 65-72) on a 1-7 Likert type scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

Relationship exclusivity. Relationship type was measured with an item that asked participants to "describe your relationship at the time you wanted your partner to try something new sexually. Responses included casually dating, serious/exclusive dating, engaged, married, or they could write in a different type of relationship. To test if relationship exclusivity was a moderating variable, these relationship types were collapsed into exclusive vs. casual relationships. The few people (n = 18) who marked "other" typically described some form of friends with benefits relationship so all of these were included in the casual relationship. Casual relationships were thus those who indicated casual dating or friends with benefits and all others

were classified as being in a committed relationship. Most people reported being in a committed relationship (n = 164, 70.7%).

Demographic items. Finally, participants reported their gender, ethnicity, age, their partner's gender, and how long they had been in the relationship at the point in which they made the request.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Preliminary Data Analyses

Scale Construction

As shown in Table 5, the measures for intimacy, sexual communication with partner, and behavioral uncertainty about a partner's response all had good internal consistency (see Table 5). Other measures required some modification and are described in more detail below. Unless noted otherwise, all scales were formed by summing the items and dividing by the number of items.

Predicted outcome values. Seven items were used to assess predicted outcome values for talking about the new sexual act (POV-Talk) and then to try the new sexual act (POV-Try). The same item was dropped from both POV-Talk and POV-Try to enhance reliability. The item "My partner would be surprised I'd go to the effort to *talk about/try* something new" demonstrated a low item-total correlation with all other items (r = .07 POV-Talk and r = -.21 for POV-Try). As shown in Table 5, the final measures for POV-Talk and POV-Try have high internal consistency reliability.

Male sexual availability. The internal consistency reliability increased drastically when three items (e.g., It is difficult for men to tell the difference between love and lust; Women should be able to have sex with men when they want it; Men enjoy getting sexual advances from women even when they don't respond positively) were eliminated from the 7-item scale. With those items eliminated, the scale had acceptable reliability as shown in Table 5[1].

In summary, skew and kurtosis for all the variables was acceptable with a criterion of the absolute value of 2.0 and all the measures showed good internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .80$).

Table 5

Means, Standard Deviations, and Internal Consistency of Major Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Partner Certainty	5.16	1.45	.92
POV-Talk Time1	5.29	1.30	.89
POV- Try Time1	5.33	1.42	.92
POV-Talk Time2	5.47	1.31	.89
POV-Try Time2	5.58	1.53	.93
Intimacy	4.87	1.30	.90
Sexual Communication	5.48	1.15	.90
# of Prior Partners	4.33	5.23	--
Male Availability	4.82	1.36	.80

Correlations among Independent Variables.

Correlations among independent measures are presented in Table 6. Predicted outcome values for how a partner would respond to talking about a new sexual act (POV-Talk) and a partner's willingness to try the new sex act (POV-Try) were significantly and positively correlated. These two measures were kept as separate predictors because as illustrated below, they differentially predict the dependent measures. Behavioral uncertainty about partner strongly correlated with the two predicted outcome measures and comfort with sexual communication (Sex Talk). Not surprisingly, based on Emmers-Sommer (2004) work, comfort with sexual communication was positively and modestly associated with intimacy. Similar to Solomon and Knobloch (2001), intimacy was

negatively associated with behavioral uncertainty. Among the predictor variables, no correlations were strong enough to meet criteria for omission due to potential multicollinearity (r = .70 or higher; Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

Table 6

Zero- Order Correlation Matrix of Independent Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Behavioral Uncertainty		--					
2. POV-Talk Time2	-.60		--				
3. POV-Try Time2	-.62	.67		--			
4. Intimacy	-.20	.23	.24		--		
5. Sex Talk	-.44	.61	.35	.34		--	
6. # Partners	.06	-.05	-.08	-.10	.01		--
7. Male Availability	-.01	-.01	-.07	-.02	.05	-.06	

Strategies Used

Table 7 outlines the strategies used to get a partner to try something new sexually. Overall, results are comparable to the preliminary study in that the most popular first strategies were indirect ones; however 15.5% of participants did use some form of direct strategy first. One difference between these results and the preliminary study was the number of strategies individuals report using. In the preliminary study individuals simply wrote a story and coders found they used an average of two strategies. In this, participants circled strategies from a list and, on average, they selected 3.76 (*SD*= 1.22).

Table 7

Strategies as a Function of Percent of Sample by Order Used

	Order				
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Most Popular	Try Something New (21.2%)	Direct Request (37.2%)	Direct Request (16.9%)	Direct Action (20.0%)	Direct Action (17%)
2nd	Joking (16.5%)	Direct Statement[a] (13.2%)	Direct Statement (18.9%)	No Commitment (12.1%)	Joking[a] (12.9%)
3rd	Direct Action (6.9%)	Try Something New[a] (13.2%)	Direct Action (11.6%)	Tell Ptr What To Do (11.3%)	Tell Ptr What To Do[a] (12.9%)
4th	NV Suggestion (6.5%)	NV Suggestion (9.1%)	NV Suggestion (7.4%)	Direct Statement (10.6%)	Bargain[b] (8.2%)
5th	Bring up in General[a] (5.6%)	Joking (7.8%)	Told Ptr What to Do (6.3%)	Direct Request (9.2%)	NV Suggestion[b] (8.2%)
6th	Verbal Hints[a] (5.6%)	Bring up in General[b] (7.3%)	Bring Up in General[a] (4.2%)	NV Suggestion (7.8%)	Direct Request[c] (5.9%)
7th	Direct Statement (4.7%)	Direct Action[b] (7.3%)	No Commitment[a] (4.2%)	Explanation[a] (7.1%)	Pre-Give[c] (5.9%)
8th	Direct Request (3.9%)	Explanation[c] (5.5%)	Pre-Give[a] (4.2%)	Pre-Give[a] (7.1%)	Explanation (4.7%)
9th	Clothing[b] (2.6%)	Hints[c] (5.5%)	Joking (3.7%)	Joking (5.0%)	No Commitment[d] (3.5%)
10th	Direct Aide[b] (2.6%)	Told Ptr What to Do (3.2%)	Explanation[b] (3.2%)	Bargain (3.5%)	Try Something New[d] (3.5%)

11th	Pre-Give[c] (2.2%)	Direct Aide[d] (2.3%)	Try Something New[b] (3.2%)	Clothing (2.8%)	Direct Aide[e] (2.4%)
12th	Told Ptr What to Do[c] (2.2%)	No Commitment[d] (2.3%)	Verbal Hints[b] (3.2%)	Bring Up in General[b] (2.1%)	Clothing[e] (2.4%)
13th	Indirect Sex Aide (1.7%)	Pre-Give[d] (2.3%)	Clothing[c] (2.1%)	Direct Aide[b] (2.1%)	Bring Up in General[e] (2.4%)
14th	Debt (1.3%)	Bargain (1.4%)	Bargain[c] (2.1%)	Try Something New[c] (.7%)	Threat[f] (1.2%)
15th	Other (.4%)	Clothing[e] (.9%)	Indirect Aide[d] (1.1%)	Verbal Hint[c] (.7%)	Verbal Hint[f] (1.2%)
16th	----------	Debt[e] (.9%)	Debt[d] (1.1%)	Other[c] (.7%)	Direct Statment[f] (1.2%)
17th	----------	Indirect Aide[e] (.9%)	Threat[d] (1.1%)	----------	Debt (1.2%)
18th	----------	----------	Other[d] (1.1%)	----------	----------
Number Responding	N = 232 (100%)	N = 219 (94.4%)	N =190 (89.9%)	N= 141 (60.8%)	N=85 (36.6%)

NOTE: Strategies within columns that share superscripts were used the same number of times.

One reason for the increase number of strategies reported in Table 7 as compared to preliminary findings is fewer participants report starting with direct strategies. Similar to the preliminary study, the strategies "hinted" and "joking" with "bring up in general" were collapsed to create "gauge partner's response" category and the "direct action," "direct statement," "direct request," and "told partner how to move" strategies were condensed into "direct behaviors." This resulted in 17.7% of people reporting "direct behaviors" as their first strategy compared to 36.3% reporting in the preliminary study. The prominence of people using less direct strategies as the first message increases the likelihood of number of strategies to increase.

Another difference between the preliminary and the present results is that individuals used on average two direct statements or requests messages before moving into the use of behaviors that take agency away from a partner (direct action) and pressured strategies (e.g., lets try it just once). Another difference between strategies used in the preliminary study and the present one is that those strategies considered to exert some sort of pressure on the other person are reported later in the strategy sequence in the present study. For example, in Table 7, one can see that more pressured messages, such as "No Commitment," do not appear until the fourth message; whereas, these pressured messages were prevalent in the third message mentioned by participants in the preliminary study. In summary there was a similar pattern to the preliminary study in that the majority of people started indirect and then moved to a direct strategy and pressure, but participants reported the use of more strategies in the main study with 60.8% of the sample reporting four or more strategies.

Strategy directness. The preliminary study suggested that as the number of strategies increase, the use of direct strategies also increased. This relationship was formally tested in the main study by examining participant's own evaluations of how direct their first three strategies

were in a repeated measures analysis of variance with gender as an independent variable and age as a covariate. I examined the use of the first three strategies as over 90% of participants reported using at least three strategies. The main effect for time was significant, Wilk's $\Lambda = .90$, $F(1, 218) = 24.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. As expected from the preliminary study, participants report being significantly more direct at the third attempt ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 1.47$) than at the second attempt ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.71$) which was significantly more direct than the first attempt ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 2.03$).

Self-reported strategy directness for the first strategy was then correlated with the ease of bringing up the topic and number of strategies. As anticipated the more direct people were for their first message the fewer number of strategies participants required ($r = -.17$, $p < .05$). Examining the ease of bringing up the topic and message directness showed a significant correlation ($r = .20$, $p < .01$). This suggests that the easier a person perceives bringing up a new sexual act with a partner, the more direct they were.

Success and Relationship Exclusivity

Success. Most participants (83.5%) described a time when they were successful at getting their partner to try a new sexual act. Using between subjects *t*-tests, I examined success as a function of the relationship specific variables of behavioral uncertainty, intimacy, and sexual communication. As seen in Table 8, those who were successful felt more certain about their knowledge of their partner, more intimacy and had better sexual communication with their partner than did those who were unsuccessful.

Table 8

Success as a Function of Relationship Specific Variables

Success	Behavioral Uncertainty	Intimacy	Sexual Communication
No	5.40	4.37	4.82
(N=38)	(1.31)	(1.34)	(1.32)
Yes	3.96	4.97	5.61
(N= 193)	(1.57)	(1.28)	(1.08)

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. Mean differences as a function of success are all significantly different ($p < .01$).

Relationship exclusivity. As seen in Table 9, relationship type (exclusive or casual) predicted amount of commitment and intimacy. Those in exclusive relationships reported being more committed, $F(1, 229)= 112.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .33$, and having more intimacy $F(1, 229)= 69.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .23$. However, sexual communication was not significant $F(1, 229)= 3.04$, $p = .08$.

Table 9

Commitment, Intimacy, and Sexual Communication as a Function of Relationship Exclusivity

Success	Commitment	Intimacy	Sexual Communication
Casual	3.75	3.89	5.28
(N=67)	(1.76)	(1.20)	(1.16)
Exclusive	5.92	5.28	5.57
(N= 164)	(1.24)	(1.12)	(1.14)

Note. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. Mean differences as a function of relationship exclusivity are all significantly different ($p < .01$).

Test of Hypotheses

Predicted Outcome Values at Time 1: RQ1, H4, H6 & H8

To test the predicted outcome value hypotheses, intimacy, sexual communication and number of partners were regressed on the predicted outcome value for talking to a partner about the new sex act (POV-Talk) and on the predicted outcome value for partner's willingness to try the act (POV-Try). The overall model fit statistics for POV-Talk and POV-Try are reported here and the slope coefficients are reported under relevant hypotheses. The overall model fit was significant for both POV-Talk, $F(5, 217)= 35.69$, $p < .001$, adjR^2 = .43 and POV-Try $F(5, 217)= 14.29$, $p < .001$, adjR^2 = .23. Neither gender, β= -.11(t = .09, p= .41) nor age, β= -.02 (t= -1. 67, p=.10) were significant covariates for POV-Talk; however, gender was significant for POV-Try, β= -.92, (t= -5.38, p< .001) suggesting that women had more positive predicted outcomes for their male partner trying something new.

Research question one. RQ1 asks about the relationship between predicted outcomes and intimacy. Recall that data are used from the first predicted outcome reported, that is how they expected partner's to react *before* ever introducing the topic. The slope coefficients for intimacy regressed on predicted outcome value for talking, β = .01 (t = -.05, p = .67) or for trying, β = .11 (t = 1.52, p = .13) were not significant. These results indicate that self-reported intimacy is not associated with perceptions of positive outcomes for talking about a new sexual act or trying a new sexual act with a partner[3].

Hypothesis four. H4 proposed that as comfort with sexual communication between an individual and a partner increases so will positive predicted outcomes. The slope coefficient for the predicted outcome value for talking, β = .73 (t = .12.11, p < .001) and the predicted outcome

value for trying the sex act, β = .36 (t = 4.66, p < .001) were both significant. Supporting H4, sexual communication was positively associated with both predicted outcome values.

Hypotheses six. H6 states that the more sexually experienced a person is the more likely s/he will report positive predicted outcomes prior to making a request. The slope coefficient for POV-Talk, β= -.01 (t =.86, p= .39) and POV-Try, β = -.02 (t = -1.32, p = .13) were not significant. H6 was not supported.

Hypothesis eight. H8 proposed that for women the more sexually available they perceive men, the more positive outcomes they will predict. For these analyses, only the responses of female participants were utilized. Perception of male sexual availability was added to the above model and gender was taken out of the analysis. The analysis showed that while the model was significant [F(5, 117)= 21.50, p< .001, adjR^2= .46], there was no relationship between women's perception of male availability and POV-Talk, β= .-03 (t= -.03, p=.97). When the same model was regressed on predicted outcome values for trying something new, the model was significant, [F(5, 117)= 4.29, p< .01], however the slope coefficient for male sexual availability regressed on POV-Try was not significant, β = .-03 (t= -.68, p = .50). Thus, H8 was not supported.

In summary, the relationship specific variable of comfort with sexual communication was a significant predictor of predicted outcomes whereas intimacy and the more general sexual variables of the individual's sexual experience and a woman's beliefs about a man's sexual availability were not significant[4].

Message Directness: H1, H3, H5, H7 & H9

To test hypotheses concerning message directness, behavioral uncertainty about a partner's response, sexual communication and number of partners were regressed on message directness for the first strategy with gender and age as covariates. As shown in Table 10, the

model was not significant; however, gender was significant showing that men are more direct than women. Even though the model was not significant, as this is a dissertation, the individual slope coefficients for each of the hypotheses will be further elaborated on below.

Hypotheses one, five and seven. H1 stated that as behavioral uncertainty about the partner increases message directness for the first strategy would decrease. As can be seen in Table 10, the slope coefficient approached significance in the predicted direction. As uncertainty increased, message directness decreased. H5 and H7 were interested in the effects of comfort with sexual communication and number of sexual partners on message directness, respectively, however results showed neither slope coefficient to be significant.

Table 10

Regression of Sexual Communication and Number of Partners on Message Directness

Variable	β	*t*	*p*	adjR^2	*F*
				.00	1.26
Behavioral Uncertainty	.16	-1.76	.08		
Sexual Communication	-.13	-1.19	.24		
Number of Partners	.02	.75	.45		
Gender	.46	2.00	.04		
Age	-.00	-.01	.83		

*Model was not significant at the $p<.05$ level.

Hypothesis nine. H9 states that for women, as the perception of men being sexually available increased, the level of directness of strategies would increase. To test H9, only responses of female participants were used. When male sexual availability was added to the above model, results showed that the analysis approached significance, $F(5, 116) = 1.46$, $p=.21$ as did the slope coefficient for male sexual availability, $\beta= -.20$ ($t= -1.78$, $p = .08$). Interestingly,

this finding is suggestive of a negative relationship such that the more sexually available women perceive men, the less direct they were, H9 was not supported.

Hypothesis three. H3 is also a hypothesis about message directness; however, since it predicts a curvilinear relationship between intimacy and message directness, the model had to be run separately from the predicted linear effects above. Intimacy was regressed on message directness testing for a linear and a quadratic relationship to determine the best fit of the data. The results show a significant quadratic relationship, $F(2, 228) = 3.36$, b1 = -1.15, b2 = .14, $p<.05$, adj$R^2 = .03$. People are most direct at low and high levels of intimacy supporting H3.

Intimacy was then divided into three levels (low, medium, and high) to test if the three points were significantly different from each other. A one-way analysis of variance with message directness as the dependent variable was significant and the 3 levels of intimacy as the independent variables was significant, $F(2, 218) = 4.92$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .04$. Tukey's post hoc analyses were used to test where significant differences were found comparing the three points in the curvilinear pattern obtained for H3. Participants with moderate levels of intimacy (M = 3.56, SD = 1.55) were significantly less direct than those at higher levels of intimacy (M = 4.41, SD = 1.50, p < .01) but not from those lower in intimacy (M = 3.95, SD = 1.79, p = .33). As expected, those low and high in intimacy did not significantly differ from each other on the measure of message directness (p = .19).

Overall, results for message directness were disappointing as sexual communication (H5) and number of sexual partners (H7) were not significant predictors and behavioral uncertainty (H1) and male sexual availability (H9) only approached significance. The only significant finding was that intimacy (H3) was curvilinearly related to message directness.

Message Strategies

Hypothesis two. H2 predicted that the relationship between the second predicted outcome value and number of strategies used would be moderated by exclusivity of the relationship, such that the strength of the relationship would be stronger for those who reported being in an exclusive relationship. As shown in Table 11, the model was not significant (p= .17) for those in exclusive relationships. Examination of the individual slope coefficients revealed that POV- Talk at Time 2 approached significance and POV-Try at Time 2 was significant. These slope coefficients would suggest that the more positive POV for talking about a new sex act, the more strategies a person employed but the more positive the POV for trying a new sexual act, the fewer strategies people used. Also as shown in the bottom of Table 11, surprisingly, the analysis for people not in exclusive relationships revealed a significant model fit (p <.05) with POV-Try as the only significant variable in the model. This finding suggests that as predicted outcomes for trying the new sexual act become more positive, the fewer strategies people use when in casual relationships.

Table 11

Regression of Intimacy, Sexual Communication, and Predicted Outcome Values on Number of Strategies Used as a Function of Relationship Exclusivity

Variable	β	*t*	*p*	adjR^2	*F*
Exclusive Relationships				.01	1.52
POV-Talk Time 2	.19	1.71	.09		
POV- Try Time 2	-.18*	2.02	<.05		
Intimacy	.08	.91	.36		
Sexual Communication	.-.03	-.24	.81		
Casual Relationships				.11	2.36*

POV-Talk Time 2	.31	1.56	.12
POV-Try Time 2	-.38**	-2.88	<.01
Intimacy	.25	1.60	.11
Sexual Communication	-.04	-.22	.83

*Indicates significance at the .05 level.
**Indicates significance at the .01 level.

Post Hoc Analyses

Strategy Directness as a Function of Predicted Outcome Values.

In retrospect, it seemed wise to examine whether predicted outcome values significantly affected how direct of a strategy was employed. A regression with strategy directness being predicted by gender and the POV variables was significant, $F(3, 225)= 2.56$, $p=.05$, adj$R^2= .02$. The only significant slope coefficient was gender $\beta=.56$ ($t = 2.43$, $p<.05$). The slope coefficient for POV-trying approached significance, $\beta = .18$ ($t = 1.91$, $p=.06$). Males and those with a more positive POV that their partner would be willing to try a new sexual act were more direct.

Predicted Outcome Values at Time 2

Although I had no hypotheses about predicted outcome values after the initial strategy attempt, post hoc analyses examined POV for talking about the new sexual act and for partner's willingness to try it. Predictor variables included partner certainty, sexual communication, intimacy, gender, and age.

The overall model fit was significant for POV-Talk, $F(5, 224)= 47.69$, $p< .001$, adj$R^2=.51$. The slope coefficients for behavioral uncertainty, $\beta= -.36$ ($t = 7.38$, $p< .001$), sexual communication with partner, $\beta=.48$ ($t = 7.69$, $p < .001$) and age $\beta = -.02$ ($t= -2.01$, $p=.05$) were the only significant slope coefficients. After the initial strategy attempt, the individual's

predicted outcome value for his or her partner's willingness to continue talking about the new sexual act was positively associated with partner certainty and degree of comfort in sexual communication, yet, negatively associated with age.

The model predicting POV-Try was also significant, $F(5, 224)= 34.96$, $p < .001$, adj$R^2 = .43$. The slope coefficients for partner certainty, $\beta= -.54$ ($t = 8.88$, $p < .001$), and gender, $\beta= -.61$ ($t = -3.74$, $p< .001$) were the only significant variables. After the initial strategy attempt, predicted outcome value for his or her partner's willingness to try the new sexual act upon further discussion was positively associated with how certain they were about how their partner would respond. Furthermore, females had more positive predicted outcome values for trying a new sexual act than did males.

Endnotes

1. Given only one study, with married women as the sample, has reported using this scale, I also ran an exploratory factor analysis (Principal Components, Varimax rotation) to examine the 7 male sexual availability items. This analysis revealed two distinct factors with minimum cross-loadings: 1) the first three items, and 2) the last four items. An analysis of internal consistency reliability for the first three items showed very low inter-item correlations ($\alpha = .35$). The low reliability and minimal previous use with a restricted population led to the decision of excluding the first three items from the analysis.

2. I examined the patterns with the two most popular strategies mentioned first by participants: "Try Something New" and "Joking." Not surprisingly the patterns were very similar but interestingly the process was slightly different when people start with "Joking" because they report asking to "try something new" (27.0% of valid N) or just brought up the topic again (21.6% of valid N) after joking. When people start with a joke they typically move to another indirect statement; whereas, people who started with "Try Something New" moved straight to "Direct Request" (29.4% of valid N) or "Direct Statement" (28.2% of valid N).

3. While the slope coefficient using intimacy to predict the POV-Try variable was not significant with gender and age in the model, it was significant when run without these two covariates, $\beta=.17$ ($t= 2.41$, $p<.05$). As intimacy increases, predicted outcomes for trying a new sexual act became more positive.

4. Interactions were tested for various predictor variables with both POV and message directness as dependent variables. All interactions tested were not significant.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

While sexual communication researchers often acknowledge the positive effects talking about sex can have on a relationship (e.g., Byers, 2005; Cupach & Comstock, 1990; Elliot & Umberson, 2008; Sprecher, 2002), little work has examined specific messages people use when talking about sex and what factors affect message production. The overarching purpose of this dissertation was to illuminate the messages that people use when communicating about a new sexual act as well as gain a better understanding of this communicative process in an established sexual relationship. Results from the preliminary and the main studies demonstrate individuals use multiple messages to influence a partner to try something new sexually and that the most common approach is to start with an indirect strategy. Predicted Outcome Value (POV) theory was used to understand how relationship specific and general sexual variables might affect strategy use when initiating something new sexually. As expected, as positive predicted outcomes increased, the number of strategies used to convince the partner also increased. Moreover, relationship specific variables were better predictors of predicted outcome values and message directness than were more general sexual factors. These findings are suggestive of the prominent role that the relationship plays in communicating about sex and that perhaps people view this process as something more than a simple persuasive attempt. The following discussion provides an explanation of this perspective by examining the findings within this study and then a discussion of the utility of POV theory will be provided. Finally, the practical implications and limitations of the research are described.

Predicting POV and Message Directness

Two relationship specific factors (intimacy and sexual communication) and two general sexual factors (prior sexual partners and women's perceptions of male sexual availability) were examined as predictors of predicted outcome values for a partner's willingness to talk about a new sexual act, a partner's willingness to try a new sexual act and message directness. The number of sexual partners and perception of male sexual availability were not significant predictors, however, as hypothesized, comfort with sexual communication and intimacy correlated with POV and message directness, respectively. These findings help to understand the importance placed on the relational development role of introducing something new sexually.

Sexual communication and POV. Comfort with sexual communication was the only predictor of the hypothesized variables that significantly explained variance in both the POV for talking about something new and the POV for a partner's willingness to try something new. Sexual communication was positively correlated with POV such that the more comfortable people were with discussing sexual communication the more positive POV people had for talking and trying something new sexually. Before people approach a partner about trying something new sexually, they reflect on previous experiences to make predictions about how positive or negative a partner will respond to talking and trying a new sexual act. Considering the four predictor variables of POV (intimacy, sexual communication, number of partners, and perception of male sexual availability), sexual communication would logically make the most sense as a predictor of POV as previous experiences discussing sex are the most akin to the context of the current study. If the couple has a history of engaging in sexual communication where they can self-disclose their private thoughts about sex, they are likely to use these

experiences to predict positive responses from a partner within the context of introducing something new sexually.

Interestingly, intimacy did not have a significant effect on POV despite that intimacy is a relational factor. However, comfort and ease with self-disclosing sexual information with a partner could be perceived as a subcomponent of intimacy which would make the finding of intimacy not being significant less surprising. Emmers-Sommer (2004) refers to intimacy as quality of communication, which can include "very personal information" (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982) and even the degree to which sexual needs are communicated (Waring & Reddon, 1983). When viewing sexual communication as a subtopic within intimacy, the lack of support with the general topic of intimacy is understood better. A person is more likely to reflect back on an intimate situation such as discussing first sexual encounter rather than a discussion of an argument with a parent or an embarrassing moment.

Intimacy and message directness. Although intimacy was not significant for predicting POV, it was the only hypothesized variable that predicted message directness. Partner's behavioral uncertainty, sexual communication, number of partners, and male sexual availability were not significant predictors. As expected, intimacy was curvilinearly associated with message directness such that when people were low and high in intimacy they were more likely to use a direct strategy for initiating something new sexually. This finding is consistent with previous research that found intimacy has a curvilinear relationship with topic avoidance such that people avoid communication during moderate levels of intimacy (Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004). Although individuals in the present study did not avoid the topic altogether, people at moderate levels of intimacy were more likely to use indirect strategies than people at high and low levels of intimacy.

There are several reasons why intimacy may have had a curvilinear effect on message directness. One reason is that people at moderate levels of intimacy may be unsure of the future of the relationship. When a relationship escalates in intimacy but the level of commitment is not made explicit people become uncertain of the future and current state of the relationship (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). Making a new sexual request at this moderate level of intimacy at an uncertain time in the relationship may be difficult if an individual is afraid of offending a partner or deescalating a relationship. Thus, an indirect message can allow an individual to determine how a partner would respond to the new sexual request and continue from that point. However, at low levels of intimacy the relationship may not be established to the point that the requester cares about the sexual desires of their partner or the risk of losing the relationship. Whereas, at high levels of intimacy people already know their partner, they have high levels of self-disclosure, and are confident that what they are requesting would not offend a partner. The relationship may have a strong enough foundation that even if the partner does respond negatively, the relationship would not be lost, allowing the person to be direct without fear of losing the relationship.

Surprisingly, sexual communication was not a significant predictor for message directness. It was expected that as comfort with sexual communication increased, message directness for the first strategy would increase. As noted in preliminary results, very few participants started with a direct strategy (only 17.7%) suggesting there was not much variance in message directness at Time 1 to predict which may inhibit the ability to differentiate sexual communication from intimate communication. Furthermore, sexual communication may not predict message directness because although people may be comfortable discussing sex with a

partner, they may want to use indirect strategies to ensure the comfort of the partner or to appear considerate to one's partner (see Samp & Solomon, 1998).

Another issue that might contribute to an individual's willingness to use direct strategies is the timing of the discussion. People who are comfortable talking about sex with their partner may bring the topic up during conversation outside of sexual activity; thus, the use of direct strategies may be inappropriate at that time. Preliminary study results indicated that timing of the discussion of trying something new (during foreplay or some other time) significantly predicted the directness of the strategy such that those who were in foreplay used more direct strategies. If two people are doing nothing that pertains to sexual activity, a statement such as "would you like to do it doggy-style?" might not only seem inappropriate to the conversation but socially awkward. However, this statement in the throes of passion does not seem misplaced in the conversation. If people who are comfortable with discussing sex bring up the topic of trying something new in everyday conversation then they may be less likely to use direct strategies than people who discuss something new during sexual activity.

Future research may want to look into the effects of both situational features as well as relationship specific variables that contribute to message production. For instance, people who have high levels of sexual self-disclosure or a higher degree of comfort in talking about sex may be more likely to bring the topic up in conversation rather than during sexual activity. Future studies would likely benefit by having participants describe more details of situational features or even providing various situational features in hypothetical scenarios to determine if these have an effect on the way couples talk about sexual activity.

General sexual factors. There were several hypotheses that did not receive support. Part of the reason why hypotheses might not have received support may be, as discussed earlier, the

lack of variance in directness at Time 1 within the study (17.7%). However, the lack of variance is not the only explanation. If people perceive a request for a new sexual act as relational development, number of partners and sexual stereotyping likely would not contribute to understanding message directness. As discussed earlier, sexual literature provides evidence that previous experiences are likely to affect future behavior (Albarracin et al., 2001; Quina et al., 2000; Bippus et al., 2003); however, research on POV shows that people use previous experiences within that particular relationship to determine how to behave and predict other's behavior (Bippus et al., 2003; Ramirez et al., in press). Furthermore, Expectancy Violation Theory shows how people in relationships often create expectations within a specific relationship based on previous behavior of the partner that may vary from societal expectations or previous relationships (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995). Once people have a foundation for a relationship they may be less likely to rely on outside variables such as number of sexual partners and stereotypes to make predictions and develop messages when they can refer back to previous sexual experiences with their current partner. The fact that the study was situated in an established sexual relationship (in which they had previously engaged in sex with each other) likely contributed to the lack of support for the general sexual variables.

Overall, while findings for both general sexual and relationship specific factors were limited, relationship factors clearly had more of an effect on predicted outcomes and message directness. General sexual experience (such as number of partners) or perceptions (such as male sexual availability) may have been less important in the present work because people were asked to report on an established sexual relationship. Everyone within the study had at least one prior sexual experience with the partner in which they reported trying something new. Thus, at the time they requested a new sexual act, people likely reflected on their previous experiences with

that individual, rather than with experiences with other partners, to gain the most accurate predictions of behavioral reactions of a partner. Perhaps the general sexual variables would have been significant if participants were asked to report on a one-night stand or a first sexual experience. Despite the reasons, this finding has important implications for future research regarding sexual communication. Research will benefit from measuring relationship specific variables when dealing with sexual situations outside the context of a one-night stand and a first sexual encounter with a partner.

The Role of the Relationship

Upon initiating this project the questions guiding the research were "how do people get a partner to try something new in a sexual relationship, and what factors contribute to this persuasive attempt?" However, the results suggested that perhaps a different question needed to be answered prior to truly understanding how and why people communicate in a specific manner about new sex. How do people perceive a new sexual request within an established sexual relationship? The results elaborated on above suggest that the relationship was playing an important role within the situation and that perhaps people viewed this as relational development rather than an influence attempt. However, the support for relational variables was not the only indication that people did not view the situation as compliance-gaining but viewed it as relational development.

More evidence supporting the argument that perhaps a relational, rather than a compliance-gaining lens would have more accurately represented the viewpoint of participants comes from data collected for the preliminary study yet not reported in this dissertation. Specifically, a discrepancy was noted comparing strategies individuals reported they would use (when given a list of strategies) and strategies they reported in their stories, thus creating a

seemingly inexplicable contradiction in what people reported *actually doing* and what they reported they *would* do. However, if individuals saw the situation as relational development rather than compliance gaining, these data are perhaps not so conflicting. People circled the likelihood of using a variety of strategies developed from compliance-gaining literature (these data are not reported). The list included both positive and negative strategies such as bargaining, threat, and debt. The negative strategies is where most of the inconsistencies could be found between what one said in one's story and what was reported on the strategy list. Some participants described the use of negative strategies within their stories yet, when asked if they *would* use strategies such as "threat," they reported never using the strategies. Their perception of what they were doing was not something as manipulative or negative as bargain, threat, or debt. A person may not threaten a partner to increase intimacy in a relationship, thus what they were doing *could not* be labeled so harshly as threatening one's partner. The difference may lie not in what they were actually doing but in their perceptions of that act and the connotation associated with the labels of some of the strategies. A similar principle is seen when people say they are "protecting" a partner rather than lying to a partner. Protection is good; lying is bad. Increasing intimacy or satisfaction within a relationship is good; threatening a partner to get sex is bad.

A similar problem developed during the pilot of the main study. Several of the statements used for strategy types had to be reworded multiple times because people would suggest that no one used strategies that were "so mean" just to get sex. However, the need to write and rewrite the strategies according to how the participants would view the negative strategies makes sense after realization that people perceive the scenario as relational development. When I was writing

the strategies, I viewed it as compliance-gaining, but the situation is not about getting what you want but about improving the relationship.

When considering this new perspective on the data, the lack of significant findings with some of the hypotheses becomes helpful. The relational variables were significant because the relationship was what people were concerned about. The inability for people to see the strategies that they use as what they are (e.g., debt or bargaining) was because the request was never about them getting what they want but about building intimacy, satisfaction, or perhaps even commitment in the relationship. Viewing sexual communication through this lens can help future research to better understand the process and design studies according to how participants view the situation.

The Importance of Predicted Outcome Values

Although the framing of the situation as relational development instead of compliance-gaining was an important finding, the role that predicted outcome values played in the study also has many implications for the future of this research. In particular, I expected predicted outcome values to affect the number of messages used to get something new with relationship exclusivity to moderate the effects. I expected those in exclusive relationships would be more persistent than would those in casual relationships because those in exclusive relationships may feel the request must be fulfilled within the relationship. In other words, they have fewer options for fulfilling the sexual act than would those in casual relationships who can turn to other sexual partners if so desired. Results showed that predicted outcome values for a partner's willingness to try something new at Time 2 was positively correlated with the number of strategies that people used to influence a partner. Unexpectedly, however, the correlation between POV at Time 2 and

number of strategies was significant only for casual relationships rather than exclusive relationships, counter to expectations.

There may be many reasons why the results were significant for casual rather than committed relationships. Preliminary results showed, not surprisingly, that people who reported being in exclusive relationships reported significantly more commitment than those in casual relationships. Research on commitment has shown that people who are highly committed will often sacrifice their own desires for something that a partner wants (Van Lange et al., 1997). Partners who are in exclusive relationships may be more willing to agree to do a new sexual act that they may not have initially wanted to do. Another possibility is that a person who is requesting something new may be more willing to sacrifice their desire of something new if a partner does not have a strong desire to engage in the act; thus, they may discontinue the request. In casual relationships people report less commitment and intimacy and individuals may be more willing to pursue their own desires despite what the other person wants. The requester may be less considerate of the desires of the partner and continue to request the new sexual act until compliance is gained.

Another interesting result was that predicted outcome values for a partner's willingness to try something new positively correlated with message directness. That is the more positive a person predicted the outcome for a partner's willingness to engage in a new sexual act, the more direct people were with their initial message. This would follow the basic premise of POV theory that people aim to maximize outcomes. The most efficient way to achieve ones goals is to be explicit with a request but this can also be one of the most face-threatening strategies to a partner (Brown & Levinson, 1978). However, if a person has previous experiences to reflect upon and determines that the partner will react positively, this would diminish the perception that a direct-

request would be face-threatening to a partner. Thus, if a person predicts a positive reaction to the request (positive predicted outcome value), the best way to maximize outcomes is to be direct with the request.

These results have two important implications for the utility of POV theory: 1) they extend the empirical findings of POV to the use of predicting specific message strategies and 2) shows that POV can be applied to specific interactions beyond predicting the future of a relationship. One of the basic premises of POV theory is that people will use predicted outcome values to determine how to continue within an interaction. Typically research using POV focuses on predicting increases in amount of communication and increases in amount of information seeking in general. However, this study shows that POV can be used to determine types of messages within an interaction as well as persistence. The finding for POV affecting persistence was confined to casual relationships; in retrospect, given that POV theory was written to explain initial interactions, it makes sense that predicted outcome values might best explain less committed relationships than ones where couples are committed to the relationship. However, future research may want to test the relationship between predicted outcome values and persistence in other compliance-gaining situations (e.g., getting a partner to pick up a relative from the airport; requesting a partner spend more time together) to determine if the causal relationship variable is only significant when in the context of a sexual situation.

These findings also help to show that predicting outcome values can be applied to specific interactions. Most research using POV focuses on predicting the future of the relationship but the current study exemplifies the utility of the theory for predicting the outcome values within specific interactions. One exception is Grove and Werkman's (1991) test of reactions to visibly disabled individuals. However, their research focused on general

communicative responses such as amount of communication and number of questions asked rather than message specific qualities such as directness and types of strategies. Thus, the current study even extends Grove and Werkmen's work by examining message qualities and extending the results to ongoing relationships.

Type of Predicted Outcome Value

Another unique aspect of this study was that predicted outcome values were partitioned into two different variables: Outcomes associated with talking about the new act (POV-Talk) and outcomes associated with trying the new act (POV-Try). Given that POV-Talk and POV-Try were so highly correlated (r = .67), leads to the question of whether it is important to assess both expectations about the communicative behavior and the sexual behavior.

Examining predictors of predicted outcome values *prior* to the first strategy attempt would suggest not. Comfort with sexual communication was a positive predictor of both POV-Try and POV-Talk at Time 1 (before the first strategy attempt). The only difference in predictors of the predicted outcome values before the first strategy attempt was that females had more positive predicted outcome values that their (primarily male) partners would be willing to try the new sexual behavior than did males.

However, it is after the initial strategy attempt that we can see more robust differences in variables that predict the two POVs. After the initial attempt, partner's behavioral uncertainty predicted both POV-Talk at Time 2 and POV-Try at Time 2, however, every other predictor of the predicted outcomes at Time 2 differed. Specifically, comfort in sexual communication positively predicted and age negatively predicted POV-Talk at Time 2 whereas gender (females had more positive POV-Try than males) was the only other significant predictor of POV-Try at Time 2.

The positive correlation between behavioral uncertainty and POV was not surprising as there was already an expectation that POV would be highly correlated with certainty as the theory is founded on Uncertainty Reduction Theory with modifications to the axioms presented to focus on moving beyond reducing uncertainty but maximizing outcomes (there was a high correlation between behavioral uncertainty and POV at Time 1 as well). The correlation between comfort with sexual communication and POV-Talk at Time 2 is likely due to the fact that the correlation is between two very similar concepts: previous sexual communication and current sexual communication. Barring an extremely negative reaction by the partner at the onset of the request that is atypical to the patterns of behavior for the relationship, previous sexual communication would likely continue to impact current sexual communication. Notice the correlation between sexual communication and POV-Try was no longer significant at Time 2.

The correlation between age and POV-Talk at Time 2 is more difficult to interpret. After initiating the topic with the first attempt, people were able to gauge a partner's response and have a more accurate perception as to how positive the outcome would be. They would use this perception to determine how positive the predicted outcome value would be. Because older people had longer relationships, they may be a little more aware of what the consequences would be if the subject was pushed further. They may have known their partners well enough that pushing the topic further would elicit negative responses.

Another interesting POV finding was that, when used as a predictor variable, only POV-Try predicted message directness. This significant finding that POV-Try was more influential on message directness than POV-Talk suggests the primary concern of people is not whether their partner will communicatively respond to the request negatively but whether their partner will actually engage in the act. Research has documented that fear of rejection is a barrier to

communicating about sex (e.g., Kleinplatz, 2006). Pliskin (1996) found that people were more afraid of being rejected than contracting an STI (sans HIV/AIDS) and concluded based on interviews with people diagnosed with herpes, that people were more concerned about their social health than physical health. In many other compliance-gaining circumstances outside of sexual situations, people can politely decline a request and most requesters will feel as if their ego or social status is still maintained. In fact several theories are dedicated to understanding communicative strategies for maintaining individuals' own and other's public appearances (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978; Wilson et al., 1998). However within this study, the most influential POV variable pertained to a partner's willingness to engage in a new sex act. The importance placed on willingness to do the act (and not just responding politely) may suggest that in regards to compliance-gaining for sex, *how* one refuses a sexual advance may not matter as much as the fact that a partner did refuse the advance.

Another important factor to consider is the perception that this is not a compliance-gaining episode in the eyes of the requestor. If a person feels that what they are requesting is taking a positive step in developing the relationship, then they may be less concerned with the response as long as the request is fulfilled. They may take the perspective that once the partner actually participates in the act, the partner will then see that the idea was good for the relationship and the two are now closer for having tried it. Because the act itself is the relational development, the most important thing is to actually try it.

An interesting study would be to examine the effects of rejection in a sexual episode using different communicative responses that vary in politeness to determine if the manner in which people refuse a sexual advance minimizes the impact of the rejection and whether relationship specific variables (such as commitment) effect one's ability to accept rejection. The

study may benefit from asking couples to complete a survey in which one resisted a sexual advance and have both participants describe the situation and complete a survey based on whether they were the requester or the resister.

Gender and Success

Gender and Communication. Another interesting finding was that gender was a significant predictor for predicted outcome values for a partner's willingness to try something new. Women were more likely to predict positive outcomes for a partner's willingness to try a new sexual act than were men. I had assumed that if women expected more positive outcomes it would be a function of women's beliefs about male sexual availability, yet this relationship was not significant. One reason why women might be more optimistic about men being willing to try a new sexual behavior may lie in the differences in sexual requests made by men and women. If men asked for what might be perceived as less socially acceptable sexual acts, they may predict less positive outcome values for trying a new sexual act.

Another possibility might lie in the relational perspective of male sexual availability. That is, the measure of male sexual availability is written so it is about men in general, rather than one's partner in specific. For example, one of the questions asked if women agreed with the statement that "men will not pass up a sexual opportunity." Although many women may feel that on average men do pass up sexual opportunities they may feel that their male partner would not pass up a sexual opportunity with them. Thus, women may be more likely to agree with the statement that "My partner would not pass up a sexual opportunity with me" which would make the perception of male sexual availability into a relationship specific variable. Thus, women may have more positive predicted outcome values because they view their partner as sexually available but not necessarily men in general. As the results suggest, relationship specific

variables are more likely to predict POV and message directness, and this reworking of perception of male sexual availability would make it relationship specific and perhaps offer a better understanding of why women were more likely to predict positive predicted outcomes for a partner's willingness to try something new sexually.

Success with the Request

Finally, this study found that success rate varied for people depending on age. There was more variance in the success rate of the older population. On average, people who reported being unsuccessful was significantly older (26 years) than people who reported being successful (22 years). This difference suggests that at least within the realm of sexual communication, researchers need to be careful with generalizing results from a college population to those older than stereotypical college ages (18-23 years). More importantly one must consider why these differences exist between these age groups. One explanation might be that older individuals have experimented more with sex and tried more positions, places, and things within a relationship; thus, what might be new to a sexual relationship could be less conventional than what might be new to someone in their early 20s (e.g., threesome vs. oral sex).

Other reasons for older individuals reporting less success might be due to problems created in the relationship as a function of attempting to introduce a new sexual act. Human behavior, even sexual behavior is patterned (Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1993). The longer a couple is together the more patterned sex may become and if an individual suddenly communicates a desire to try something new, the partner may respond with suspicion of infidelity to the sudden change of the routine. Even when suspicions of infidelity do not arise, a partner may become concerned with how satisfied the individual is with the current routine or with his or herself as a sexual partner. These types of responses may result in the individual stopping pursuit of the

sexual desire or treating the sexual request more cautiously (e.g., do I really want to ask for this knowing what his or her response *might* be).

Practical Implications

The research provided within this dissertation has many practical implications within research and for people engaging in sexual activities. Specifically, this dissertation highlights the importance placed upon communicating about sex with a partner. Sex is often a critical part or will become a part of many romantic relationships. The findings showed that comfort in talking about sex contributed to positive predicted outcomes for requesting something new with a partner. This finding contributes to the argument that practice makes perfect. If couples want to learn to be comfortable making sexual request or talking about other aspects of sex (e.g., pregnancy, protection, histories) they need to be willing to talk about sex in general with a partner. Not surprisingly, when couples become more comfortable with talking about sex they are more likely to predict positive predictive outcome values in discussing sexual desires.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance placed on the relationship for understanding message production during a new sexual request and the frame in which people view this event. People were less likely to rely on sexual stereotypes and previous partners during a sexual encounter with a current partner. This finding has implications for sexual communication outside the confines of the current study. Perhaps research aimed at improving sexual health (e.g., condom use, STI testing, sexual consent) may want to consider using a more relational approach that can affect the communication processes within various sexual situations. Sexual health may also benefit from trying to understand how people view communication about condom use. A common perspective is that condoms create a sense of distrust. If this coincides with a perspective that the relationship is in decline, then this viewpoint may help researchers to

reframe communication about condoms between partners. Furthermore, other research on sexual communication may also want to consider the role that predicted outcome values have within a situation. This may help to understand the true fear behind rejection and ways to combat these fears.

Finally, the preliminary and main studies provided a list of strategies that are commonly used within the confines of a relationship to get a partner to try something new. The majority of people who engage in sex within the United States do so within committed relationships (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2007). Thus, research should increasingly focus on understanding messages within relationships as this is where the majority of sexual communication will emerge. Furthermore, it is exceedingly important for people within long-term committed relationships to be able to communicate about sex as this is correlated with sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Thus, this dissertation aimed to accomplish that goal of looking at communication messages about sex outside the context of a one-night stand or of initiating sex for the first time. People most typically started with an indirect message although there are individuals who are very direct when initiating something new. People who do use direct strategies were more likely to report low or high intimacy with their partners. When considering the people who are able to be direct and are very high in intimacy, perhaps ability to be open, direct, honest and explicit with one of the most private forms of communication shows true connection between partners. Couples should strive to achieve this type of direct communication about sex to strengthen a relationship as many people consider talking about sex more intimate than actually engaging in it (Pliskin, 1997).

Another interesting implication from the list of strategies provided is the insight into what people actually consider to be introducing the topic of sex. For example, a common approach to

talking about sex was to joke about it or even discuss what friends have done. Messages considered jokes or random conversations are intended to introduce the topic into the relationship. Thus, a partner may want to acknowledge these statements or jokes instead of dismiss them as unimportant.

Limitations

Although there were strengths in this study, there were limitations as well. One of the main limitations of the study is that the majority of participants were college aged. Several efforts were made to target people over the age of 30 but received minimal responses. First, I asked friends and colleagues if they were interested in participating; however, this resulted in more people between the ages of 25-30 completing the surveys than those over the age of 30. Next, I turned to churches to see if I could recruit people in return for a donation to church funds but was met with hesitation and no responses to emails and phone calls. Finally, I turned to using an internet survey as an easier way to reach people; it resulted in only a 16% response rate.

There are likely several things that might contribute to such an abysmal response rate within this population. The hesitation and lack of responses of this targeted population may suggest that older generations are much more reticent to write about sexual experiences or were less likely to do so because of the lack of incentives (e.g., college students received course participation credit). When asked, a few people explained they did not really have anything to write and that they never tried to introduce anything new to a sexual relationship. For example, one person commented that he was just happy to get sex much less push for something more. Yet, another commented that it was too private for them to write about even though the survey was anonymous.

A second difficulty for older respondents may be methodological: Participants were immediately asked to write about a very personal experience. Starting with personal information may have dissuaded people from completing the survey, especially without an incentive when people were having reservations about the topic anyway. A better approach to the structure of the survey may have been to start with a less difficult topic such as questions about the relationship with their partner. In addition, college student and younger people are more used to filling out surveys on a variety of issues as a function of social science classes they are taking or have recently took in college. Therefore, they may have found it easier to simply "jump in" and complete the survey than older people who likely have not filled out such surveys in years, much less a survey asking about sexual communication behavior.

These anecdotes solidify the need for further research within this area and specifically with this population. People who are unable to make new sexual requests or feel that completing an anonymous survey about sex is too revealing of private information are precisely the individuals that could benefit from the research the most. Furthermore, people who reported being unsuccessful were significantly older in age (26 years) than people who were successful (22 years) suggesting that those who did bring up the topic were often unsuccessful.

The aim of this research was to gain an understanding about communication messages regarding sex to help individuals who have trouble speaking about sexual desires. Thus, future research may want to work on methods for targeting these individuals. One suggestion might be to target a larger population so that the survey reaches more than 150-160 people. Another approach might be to post advertisements around town or posting the survey as a link on other websites and offering incentives (such as money) for completing the survey. This would help to

reach more people unknown to the researcher, which should offer respondents an even better feeling of anonymity.

Another limitation of the current study, which very likely contributed to some people's unwillingness to complete the survey, was that the survey started with a question asking people to describe a sexual experience when they wanted to try something new. When research asks about sensitive subjects, beginning with easier questions, such as information regarding intimacy or commitment within the relationship can help people to ease into the topic before asking some of the more personal questions (O'Brien, Black, Carley-Baxter, & Simon, 2006). This approach was not taken as most of the items on the questionnaire pertained to a very specific sexual experience: a time one attempted to talk to one's partner about a new sexual act. For example, to report about the amount of intimacy one felt for a partner, one needs a reference point as to what point in time and, perhaps even which sexual partner the participant is to refer to in his or her answers. In other words, if the sexual request happened 8 months ago, I was most interested in their perceptions of intimacy at that point in time rather than at the present time. Since majority of the questions referenced the experience, the questionnaire had to lead off with a more personal question.

Because the questionnaire asked people to reflect back on a time when they wanted to try something new sexually, some of the responses asking participants how they felt at the time may be biased because they know the outcome of the experience. The average of each of the POV variables was above five (out of seven) and the majority of the people reported on a successful attempt to get something new sexually. Because people were aware that the attempt to get something new was successful, this may have biased their reports of POV prior to introducing

the topic of something new as overly positive. It may be difficult to imagine expecting a negative response from a partner after the partner has already engaged in an act.

Another limitation of both the preliminary and main studies is that the self-report data were retrospective data. Along with the positivity bias noted above, participants may be more likely to forget key details and emotional reactions the further the reporting is in time from the actual occurrence of the event (Metts, Sprecher, & Cupach, 1991). This possibility was controlled for as best possible by asking participants to consider the most recent time they attempted to get their partner to try a new sexual act. Future research may benefit from having people use a diary format for the experience and ask participants to complete the questionnaire immediately after the experience. This may help to increase the accuracy of the reported predicted outcome values.

In the second study, participants listed the order in which each strategy was used which meant participants could not report simultaneous use of strategies. At times, people may have used verbal and nonverbal strategies together. For instance, the words "let's try something new" may coincide with the nonverbal behavior of pulling out a new sex toy. The measurement for identifying and listing the order of the strategies did not account for this type of simultaneous behaviors. Most of the nonverbal behaviors participants self-reported were quite direct in both the preliminary study (e.g., I just picked her up and turned her around) and the main study (e.g., physically moved/touched my partner or myself and did what I wanted). People did not report more subtle nonverbal behaviors (e.g., putting their hand on a shoulder or looking at a partner a particular way). If one was to report a statement or a non-verbal cue that accompanied the statement, it is easy to see how the individual would be more likely to select the verbal statement, thus creating a bias towards the verbal in these data. Unfortunately, this is a limitation

within research specifically involving patterns of communication within an influence episode specifically with the use of questionnaires because flexibility is limited. While questionnaire data is unquestionably more reliable, qualitative data, such as in-depth interviewing, may provide data that are more valid in that participants can describe simultaneous strategy use and more nuanced details on the use of strategies. Interviews, especially if the interviewer uses follow-up probes effectively, may help researchers to delve more deeply into the use of nonverbal behaviors in sexual communication situations.

Finally, future research would benefit from a wider array of relationships or a better measure of how committed participants were in their relationships. The current study was biased towards exclusive relationships and successful attempts at getting something new. If this research was duplicated, one way this could be done is through stressing that the attempt at getting something new does not have to be successful or to ask participants to recall a time when they were not successful. Another method that will ensure equal representation of casual relationships and unsuccessful attempts is by using hypothetical situations. One could base the scenarios off the common patterns presented within the current studies to ensure the experience is realistic. Success and relationship status could be manipulated within the stories that people reference for completing the survey.

Conclusion

The studies in this dissertation offer insight into the communication process of compliance gaining in a sexual context. Comfort with sexual communication was the important predictor of predicted outcome values before initiating the new sexual act. Females had more positive outcome values concerning their (primarily male) partners interest in trying a new sexual act but gender did not affect predicted outcome values concerning talking about a new

sexual act. For predicting message directness, intimacy was curvilinearly related with message directness. In addition, males and those with a more positive POV that their partner would be willing to try a new sexual act were more direct. Future research can use this study as a foundation for looking at other communication patterns or message production and to examine more specific aspects of POV theory.

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APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENT FOR PILOT STUDY

You will write about a time when you wanted to try a new sexual act with your partner but were uncertain about how he/she would respond. **NOTE**: **Do not write about a one-night stand**. If you can not think of a time, you can write about when *someone else* wanted you to try something new sexually with you.

I will write about a time when…. (Circle one):

OPTION A. I wanted to try something new sexually

OPTION B. A sexual partner wanted me to try something new

1. How would you describe your relationship at the time you wanted your partner to try something new sexually? We were….. (circle one)

1) Casually dating 2) Serious/exclusive dating

3) Engaged 4) Married

5) Other _____(Please describe)

2. Write the steps you took to try something new sexually. Start with when you first decided to take action and end with getting what you wanted or when you gave up. Make sure to write down *everything* you did, hinted or said and what your partner did or said. (For Option B: follow these instructions but think about what your sexual partner said/hinted/did and how you responded.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. In the situation that you wrote about on the previous page did you…

A. Get what you wanted B. Give up

4. You wrote about a time when you were uncertain about how your sexual partner would react to your request. Below, write down *why* you were uncertain about how he/she would react.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. What is your gender (circle one) 1) Male 2) Female

6. Which ethnic background or race do you most closely identify? (select ones that apply)

1) Black/African American 2) Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
3) Hispanic/Latino 4) Asian
5) White 6) American Indian/Alaskan Native
7) Other_____ (please specify)

7. How old are you? _____ (in years).

8. The other person is (circle one) 1) Male 2) Female

9. How long had you been in your relationship at the time you asked them to try something new sexually? _____ years and _____ months

Thank you for participating!

Information Letter about Sexual Communication Strategies Study

Dear Participant:
I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Monahan in the Department of Speech Communication. I invite you to participate in our survey study titled "Sexual Communication Strategies." My phone number is 706-542-0952 and my e-mail is harriss6@uga.edu.

The purpose of our study is to understand how people communicate about sex. You will answer questions about a time you wanted to try something new sexually with a partner but you were uncertain about how your partner would respond. If you have never asked a partner to do so, then you can write about a time a partner asked you to try something new. The survey takes about 30 minutes. To participate, you must be (a) 18 years or older and (b) either currently (or formerly) be sexually active.

Your involvement is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may skip items that make you feel uncomfortable. The results of this participation will be anonymous. There will be no way for your responses to be connected to your individually-identifiable information. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

Your choice to participate (or not) will not affect your grades or class standing. If you choose not to participate in this study there are other options available to meet the requirement including writing a journal article summary, attending a departmental colloquium, or participating in other studies. Participation fulfills the research requirement for your speech communication course.

This research will have educational benefits in the realm of sexual relationships. Research suggests that many people would like to change something about their sexual relationship (Colson et al., 2006). Furthermore, many studies have shown that sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction is correlated (Byers, 2005) and that communication is an important aspect to this correlation (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Thus, by better understanding what strategies people do utilize we can begin to assess the efficacy of those strategies and work to generate more useful strategies for those who are unsuccessful. By participating in this study, you may improve your knowledge and understanding of your relationships and insights about your communication choices.

Few if any known risks are associated with completing this survey. Answering questions regarding a past sexual experience may trigger some stress or discomfort. If this happens, you may skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable but if the discomfort warrants a referral to a mental health professional, you will receive information about and a referral to the UGA Health Center's Counseling and Psychological Services (706-542-2273) and a list of local mental healthcare providers. You may also email us a later date if you need a referral. The potential referral to a mental health professional will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact a researcher using the information provided below. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Please keep this letter for your records. If you complete and return this questionnaire to the researcher, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Shawna Harris, MA
hariss6@uga.edu

Jennifer L. Monahan, Ph.D.
jmonahan@uga.edu

Debriefing Statement for Sexual Communication Strategies Study

Thank you very much for participating in our study. Surprisingly, there is little research on the strategies people use to convince a partner to try something new sexually. While many studies find communication is vital to a good sexual relationship, no one ever explains *how* people talk to their partners. Understanding how people talk to their partners about sexual matters is critical because of the large number of adults who have a desire to change something about their sexual relationships but do not know how (Colson et al., 2006). Furthermore, many studies find effective communication is critical to both sexual and relational satisfaction (Byers & Demmons, 1999).

We will examine the data provided by you and other participants to understand the strategies people use to talk to their partner about trying a new sexual act. Specifically, we are interested in understanding which strategies are used most often, what situations people are more likely to try these strategies in, why people are uncertain about their partner's reactions, and whether men and women use different strategies. A followup study will test which strategies are most effective in getting a partner to try a new sexual act without harming the relationship. These two studies will enable us to offer advice to long-term partners on how to communicate about sex which, in turn, may help lower the number of people who want to change aspects of theis sex life as well as increasing their relational satisfaction.

Your responses are very valuable to us and we *very much* appreciate that you took the time to complete our survey. Please email Shawna Harris (harriss6@uga.edu) if you have any questions about the study or if you would like a summary of our findings.

Many Thanks.

Shawna Harris, MA
harriss6@uga.edu
706-543-0952

Jennifer L. Monahan, Ph.D.
jmonahan@uga.edu

Colson, M.H., Lemaire, A., Pinton, P., Hamidi, K., & Klein, P. (2006). Sexual behaviors and mental perception, satisfaction and expectations of sex life in men and women in France. *Journal of Sexual Medicine, 3*, 121-131.

Byers, E.S., & Demmons, S. (1999). Sexual satisfaction and sexual self disclosure within dating relationships. *The Journal of Sex Research, 36*, 180-189.

APPENDIX B

INSTRUMENT FOR MAIN STUDY

Please read the directions thoroughly throughout the survey.
Think of a specific and the most recent time you tried to introduce something new sexually to an established sexual relationship. Answer the following questions in reference to this specific time. **NOTE**: **This is not a one-night stand or the first time you had sex with this partner.** You have already had sex with this partner and you want to try something new.

Think about *everything* that you did, or said, to show your partner that you wanted something new sexually. The things you did or said may have occurred at one time (First I laid out a magazine open to the page with the new position. Second I told my partner that I wanted to try something new. Third, I told her that I wanted to try doggy-style). Or may have occurred over a period of days (First, I asked my partner what he thought about trying sex in new places. Second, a few days later, I just grabbed my partner's hand and took him to the kitchen). You should report both nonverbal acts (I put my legs over my partner's shoulders) and verbal acts (Then I told him that's what felt good for me).

1. What new sexual act did you want to try with your partner?

   _____

   _____

2. While recalling this time when you wanted something new, describe in specific detail **everything you did or said** *and* **any responses that your partner** may have verbally or nonverbally given.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Refer back to your story and circle below *anything* you did or said from this list. Circle only those that you remember doing and saying specific to this experience based on your story.

a. Physically moved/touched my partner or myself and did what I wanted.
b. Physically moved/touched my partner or myself that suggested what I wanted but did not do the act.
c. Dressed in a way that signaled what I wanted.
d. I told my partner that I would do something for them if they did this for me.
e. I did something for my partner so they would be more likely to do what I wanted in return.
f. I set out a magazine, toy, video, etc to suggest what I wanted.
g. I showed my partner a magazine, video, etc. to clearly show my partner what I wanted.
h. I told my partner about things I had done in the past for him/her to get what wanted.
i. I mentioned to my partner that I wanted to "try something new."
j. I told my partner we should do the new act I desired.
k. I told my partner what to do.
l. I asked my partner if they wanted to try the new act I desired.
m. I discussed the topic with my partner without stating that I wanted to do the act.
n. I told my partner that we should "at least try it once."
o. I explained to my partner why we should do the act (love, the relationship, feels good, etc.).
p. I joked about the topic with my partner.
q. I told my partner that I would not do something for him/her or stop doing something until they did this for me.
r. I said things that hinted what I wanted but was unclear.
s. Other_____

3. **Refer back to the things you did and said that you just circled.** Indicate below which thing you did *first* by putting the letter next to "First" below. Then, figure out what you did *second,* and write that down next to second below. Please rank the ones that you circled in the order in which they were said or done to the best of your ability. Leave any extra spaces empty if you used less than five.

First_____, Second_____, Third, _____, Fourth_____, Fifth_____

Referring to the First- Fifth statements that you ranked, indicate how direct (e.g., clear, unambiguous) the statements/behaviors were for each one you ranked. If you did not use all five rankings, circle "NA"

	Very Indirect						**Very Direct**	
4. **First** strategy was…	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
5. **Second** strategy was…	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
6. **Third** strategy was…	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
7. **Fourth** strategy was…	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
8. **Fifth** strategy was….	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

9. We know that asking a partner to try something new sexually can be difficult to do. How *hard* was it for you to bring it up?

Very Hard for me to do/say	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Very Easy to do/say

Sometimes a partner is comfortable talking about a new sexual act but he or she may or may not want to engage in the act. Think about how you felt before doing or saying anything to your partner about a new sex act. Think about concerns you had about your partner's willingness to talk about it and your partner's willingness to try the new act.

How sure were you about how your partner was going to react to your request? Please complete the following sentence by circling the number that best represents how you felt *prior* to initiating the new act.

I was_____ he/she would be interested in talking about trying a new sexual act.

10. Unsure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sure
11. Uncertain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Certain
12. Insecure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Confident

I was_____ he/she would be interested in trying a new sexual act.

13. Unsure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Sure
14. Uncertain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Certain
15. Insecure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Confident

Think about *how you expected* your partner to respond to the new sex act *prior* to initiating it.

	Strongly Disagree						**Strongly Agree**
Before I asked him/her, I *thought…*							
16. My partner would be happy *to talk* about the possibility of a new act	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. My partner would be happy *to try* the new sexual act	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. My partner would be uncomfortable *talking* about the possibility of a new sexual act	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. My partner would be uncomfortable *doing* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. My partner would be excited about *talking* about a new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My partner would be excited to *try* the new sexual act	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. My partner would be upset about *talking* about a new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. My partner would be upset about *doing* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. My partner would be favorable towards *talking* about the possibility of a new sexual act	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. My partner would be favorable towards *trying* the new sexual act	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. My partner would feel it was rewarding for us to *talk* about my desire to try something new sexually.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. My partner would feel it was rewarding for us to *do* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. My partner would be surprised I'd go to effort to *talk* to him/her about trying something new.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. My partner would be surprised I'd go to the effort to *try* that sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

30. Indicate how you thought your partner *would initially* respond to your request (circle):

Very Negatively	Somewhat negatively	Neutral	Somewhat Positively	Very Positively

Now think about how your partner *actually responded* to what you initially did or said. Based on your partner's response indicate how strongly you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly Disagree						**Strongly Agree**
31. My partner was happy *to talk* about the possibility of the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. My partner was happy *to try* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. My partner was uncomfortable *talking* about the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. My partner was uncomfortable with the idea of *doing* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. My partner was excited about *talking* about the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. My partner was excited to *try* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. My partner was upset about *talking* about the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. My partner was upset about the possibility of *doing* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. My partner reacted favorably towards *talking* about the possibility of a new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
40. My partner reacted favorably towards *trying* the new sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41. My partner saw it was rewarding for us to *talk* about my desire to try something new sexually.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42. My partner thought it would be rewarding for us to *do* the new sexual behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43. My partner was surprised I'd go to the effort to *talk* to him/her about trying something new.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44. My partner was surprised I'd go to the effort to *try* that sexual act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

45. Given my partner's *initial reaction,* I thought I still had a chance to convince him/her to try the new sexual act:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Absolutely Not Happening	Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Unsure	Somewhat Likely	Likely	100% Sure

For the following set of questions, consider how committed you felt to that partner **at that point in time** in which you wanted to try something new. Circle how strongly you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						**Strongly Agree**
46. I want our relationship to last for a very long time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
47. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
48. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
49. I feel very attached to our relationship—very strongly linked to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
50. I want our relationship to last forever.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
51. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

For the following set of questions, think about how you felt **at that point in time** in which you tried to introduce something new to the relationship. Consider how close you felt to your partner and circle how strongly you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
52. I feel that I can confide in this person about virtually everything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
53. I would do anything for this person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
54. If I could never be with this person, I would feel miserable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
55. If I were lonely, my first thought would be to seek this person out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
56. One of my primary concerns is this person's welfare.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
57. I would forgive this person for practically anything.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
58. I feel responsible for this person's well-being.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
59. I would greatly enjoy being confided in by this person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
60. It would be hard for me to get along without this person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
61. My partner and I share personal information with one another.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
62. There is nothing I couldn't tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
63. My partner and I self-disclosure private thoughts and information to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
64. There are things I can tell my partner that I can't tell anyone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

For the following questions I want you to think about how you communicated to your partner about sex. Indicate how strongly you agree with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
65. My partner and I share sexual information with one another.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
66. There is nothing about our sex life I couldn't tell my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
67. My partner and I self-disclose our private thoughts and information about sex .	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
68. My partner and I have difficulty discussing most sexual topics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
69. I can talk to my partner about anything sexual.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
70. My partner and I talk to each other about a variety of sexual topics.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
71. My partner and I are open about sexual communication.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
72. My partner and I consider sex to be a taboo topic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sometimes people have beliefs for how men behave in regards to heterosexual sex. For the following questions, circle how strongly you agree with the each statement.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
73. It is difficult for men to tell the difference between love and lust.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
74. Women should be able to have sex with men when they want it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
75. Men enjoy getting sexual advances from women even when they don't respond positively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
76. If a woman wants to have sex, she can expect a male partner to make himself available to her.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
77. Men will not pass up a sexual opportunity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
78. It's easy for a woman to sexually arouse a man if she really wants to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
79. Men appreciate all sexual opportunity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The following section asks about some of the details about your partner, yourself and the relationship.

80. How long ago did this occur? _____years _____months _____weeks _____days

81. Was there alcohol involved when you introduced something new? 1) Yes 2) No

If yes, rate the level of alcohol for you and your partner: No Alcohol Drunk

81b. Yourself 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

81c. Your partner 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

82. When you FIRST brought up the topic of something new, was it during either sex or foreplay?

1) Yes 2) No 3) Other (explain)_____

83. Up to that point in time, I had sex with _____ people. (include your partner)

84. How would you describe your relationship at the time you wanted your partner to try something new sexually? We were….. (circle one)

1) Casually dating 2) Serious/exclusive dating

3) Engaged 4) Married

5) Other _____(Please describe)

85. The gender that your partner most closely identifies with is (circle one) 1) Male 2) Female

86. Did you

1) Get what you wanted 2) Give up 3) Other_____

87. How long had you been in your sexual relationship at the time you asked them to try something new?

_____ years _____ months _____ days

88. Are you currently in a relationship with this person? 1) Yes 2) No 3) Maybe_____

89. The gender that you most closely identify with is (circle one) 1) Male 2) Female

90. Which ethnic background or race do you most closely identify? (select ones that apply)

1) Black/African American 2) Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
3) Hispanic/Latino 4) Asian
5) White 6) American Indian/Alaskan Native
7) Other_____ (please specify)

91. How old are you? _____ (in years).

92. In my lifetime, I have had sex with _____ people.

93. Concerning sexual orientation, I identify most as: (Circle one)

1) Bisexual 2) Gay
6) Lesbian 4) Heterosexual
5) Transgendered 6) Other (please specify):_____

Informational Letter for Main Study

Dear Participant:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Monahan in the Department of Speech Communication. I invite you to participate in our survey study titled "Sexual Communication Strategies." My phone number is 706-542-0952 and my e-mail is harriss6@uga.edu.

The purpose of our study is to understand how people communicate about sex. You will answer questions about the most recent time you wanted to try something new sexually with a partner. The survey takes about 30 minutes. To participate, you must be: (a) 18 years or older and (b) either currently (or formerly) be sexually active.

Your involvement is voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may skip items that make you feel uncomfortable. The results of this participation will be anonymous. There will be no way for your responses to be connected to your individually-identifiable information. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

If you are enrolled in a speech communication course, your choice to participate (or not) will not affect your grades or class standing. If you choose not to participate in this study there are other options available to meet the requirement including writing a journal article summary, attending a departmental colloquium, or participating in other studies. Participation fulfills the research requirement for your speech communication course.

This research will have educational benefits in the realm of sexual relationships. Research suggests that many people would like to change something about their sexual relationship (Colson et al., 2006). Furthermore, many studies have shown that sexual satisfaction and relational satisfaction is correlated (Byers, 2005) and that communication is an important aspect to this correlation (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Thus, by better understanding what strategies people do utilize we can begin to assess the efficacy of those strategies and work to generate more useful strategies for those who are unsuccessful. By participating in this study, you may improve your knowledge and understanding of your relationships and insights about your communication choices.

Few if any known risks are associated with completing this survey. Answering questions regarding a past sexual experience may trigger some stress or discomfort. If this happens, you may skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable but if the discomfort warrants a referral to a mental health professional, you will receive information about and a referral to the UGA Health Center's Counseling and Psychological Services (706-542-2273) and a list of local mental healthcare providers. You may also email us a later date if you need a referral. The potential referral to a mental health professional will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact a researcher using the information provided below. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

Please keep this letter for your records. If you complete and return this questionnaire to the researcher, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project. Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Shawna Harris, MA
hariss6@uga.edu
706-543-0952

Jennifer L. Monahan, Ph.D.
jmonahan@uga.edu

Debriefing Sheet for Main Study

Thank you very much for participating in this study on the strategies for initiating something new sexually in a relationship. Your responses are very valuable to us in examining and understanding how people introduce new topics to a sexual relationship. Your responses also provided us with insight on the utility of compliance gaining techniques and theories within the context of a sexual relationship.

The majority of the questions were asked to understand how people introduce new sexual behaviors into a relationship including what you have used in a specific instance. By recalling a previous experience in which you introduced something new sexually to a relationship we are able to determine the strategies that are common and determine how these strategies should be categorized. Furthermore, we will determine if there are any differences between strategies used by males and females and what relational factors contribute to the use of specific strategies.

We thank you again for your help in completing this research. The information that you provided today will remain completely anonymous. If you have additional questions, please contact the researcher BELOW. In addition, please let us know if you would like a copy of the results when they are available.

Shawna Harris
DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION
PHONE: 706-543-0952
EMAIL: harriss6@UGA.EDU.

Should you feel some undue psychological stress or discomfort from thinking about or responding to some of the questions today, you may contact UGA Health Center's Counseling and Psychological Services at 706-542-2273.

APPENDIX C

CODEBOOK FOR MAIN STUDY STRATEGY DIRECTNESS*

7= Very Direct… it is clear that the person WANTS a specific act and there is little to no agency on the part of the partner.

Strategies: A, J, N, Q. K

A) Physically moved/touched my partner or myself and did what I wanted.
J) I told my partner we should do the new act I desired.
N) I told my partner what to do.
Q) I told my partner that we should "at least try it once."
K) I told my partner that I would not do something for him/her or stop doing something until they did this for me.

6= Direct… The individual shows desire for a specific act but gives agency to other person. This gives the other person the option but is clear on the topic.

Strategies: D, L

D) I told my partner that I would do something for them if they did this for me.
L) I asked my partner if they wanted to try the new act I desired.

5= The topic is clear but the idea is less directed toward the partner. However the sexual request is clearly linked to the individuals in the relationship engaging in the act.

Strategies: B,G, O

B) Physically moved/touched my partner or myself that suggested what I wanted but did not do the act.
G) I showed my partner a magazine, video, etc. to clearly show my partner what I wanted.
O) I explained to my partner why we should do the act (love, the relationship, feels good)

4= The topic is unclear but the individual makes the desire to do something different explicit

Strategies: I

I) I mentioned to my partner that I wanted to "try something new."

3= The topic is suggested but there is some room for miscommunication specifically on whether the individual actually desires the act. There is agency as the person requesting has not actually made any request. This differs from 5 as there is no suggestion of the person requesting does not commit to desiring the act.

Strategies: C, H, P

C) Dressed in a way that signaled what I wanted.
H) I told my partner about things I had done in the past for him/her to get what I wanted
P) I joked about the topic with my partner.

2= The topic is suggested but there is no use of "you, I or we" doing the act and possibly is not even directed toward the partner.

Strategies: F, M

F) I set out a magazine, toy, video, etc to suggest what I wanted.
M) I discussed the topic with my partner without stating that I wanted to do the act.

1= The individual is unclear on specifically what they desire and possibly even the desire for something new.

Strategies: E, R

E) I did something for my partner so they would be more likely to do what I wanted in return.
R) I said things that hinted what I wanted but was unclear.

*NOTE: Depending on the manner in which the strategies are used, it is possible that they may fit in more than one level of directness. So based on the coding scheme, each strategy was placed in the most appropriate category.